IBN AL-ʿARABĪ

THE RINGSTONES OF WISDOM (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*)

Translation, Introduction, and Glosses by

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Great Books of the Islamic World

The Ringstones of Wisdom

The *Fusus al-Hikam* of Ibn al-ʻArabi

Translation, Introduction, and Glosses

by

Caner K. Dagli

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Ringstones of Wisdom

The *Fusus al-Hikam* of Ibn al-'Arabi

INTRODUCTION

Caner K. Dagli

The Ringstone of Adam begins with the Real (*al-Haqq*), which might also be rendered as the Truth or the Reality. It signifies the Essence of God, the Ultimate Reality beyond all distinctions, polarities, and relativizations. The Essence or Self is neither this or that, nor is it not this or not that, being beyond all qualifications. Ibn al-'Arabi employs *al-Haqq*, as do other Islamic metaphysicians, not only as an alternate expression for *Allah*, but also out of a sense of spiritual propriety or *adab*. This is not to say that the use of the Name *Allah* as such is considered a blasphemy or an act of taking the Divine Name in vain. Rather, the use of the Name *Allah* invokes a presence that is, in a sense, too much for certain contexts to bear. Among the Sufis, not only is the Name *Allah* the Supreme Name that encompasses all other Names, but it is also the personal Name of God, as it is for all believers. *Allah* carries with it a *tremendum* not only by virtue of God's omnipotence and utter transcendence but also as a result of the awesome proximity that it owns by virtue of being the all-encompassing Name. Through employing a Name such as the Real, one is able to evoke the all-comprehensiveness and totality of God without abusing the Name *Allah*. In almost all cases where some sort of identity is implied or stated between the Divine

and its manifestations, a Name other than *Allah* is used. It is not a question of the use of the Name *Allah* as such, but of using it with poor *adab* and with a pseudo-mystical self-indulgence. Ibn al-'Arabi's use of *al-Haqq* in instances where the divinity and creature seem to be changing places in the text is an expression of the operative and lived presence which the Name *Allah* evokes for the author of such a work and traditionally for most of its readers. The economy of the use of the Name *Allah* and other Essence-denoting Names such as *al-Haqq* expresses a recognition that one does not talk about God the way one talks about other conceptual categories.

"The Real willed, by virtue of his Most Beautiful Names, which are innumerable..." Beginning with the Essence, we are then introduced to the Divine Names and Qualities. The phrase "Most Beautiful Names" refers the verse of the Quran, *To God belong the Most Beautiful Names, so call by them*.[1] Each Name is a Name of the one and unique Essence, without the Essence thereby undergoing any division or multiplicity. Ibn al-'Arabi calls the Names *relationships* or *attributions*, both of which are conveyed by the Arabic word *nisbah*. They are *relationships* insofar as they signify the relationship between God and the world, such as the Names the Creator and the Giver of Life. Each Name is a way of describing the relationship between God and the world or 'what is other than God', because to say Creator is already to say creation, and to say Giver of Life is already to say living beings. They are *attributions* inasmuch as they are none other than the Divine Essence. He receives the ascriptions that we come to know as Divine Names and Qualities while remaining the One Essence. They are innumerable because the Divine Essence, though unique, is infinite.

Because existence is one, the Names are non-existential (*'adami*) relationships or attributes. *'Adam* is non-existence or non-being, and is contrasted with existence (*wujud*). In this sense *wujudi* and *'adami* could also be translated as concrete and non-concrete. *'Adami* or non-existential is the term used to designate something that is not in and of itself a concrete entity, but which expresses the limitations or boundary conditions of concrete entities or the relationships between them. *Wujudi*, meaning existential or concrete, is used to designate that which pertains to the concrete aspects of entities in themselves, with respect to what one might call their positive content as opposed to their boundaries or relationships. The Names and Qualities are non-existential in the sense that they are not separate concrete entities. They are relationships between God and the world or are limitative attributions of the one Essence, limiting because a particular Name, while denoting God, only does so in a certain respect. Were the Qualities to denote concrete entities, the Creator would be concretely different than the Lord, which would lead to two divinities and which would violate the Unity of God. The Self is infinite without violating its Unity.

[1] 7:180

"…To see their identities—or if you so wish, to see His Identity…" This phrase brings us to the incredibly rich and central term *'ayn*. It is one of the most challenging terms to translate in Ibn al-'Arabi's metaphysics, possessing as it does several unique meanings, occupying a place of extreme importance, and occurring with great frequency throughout the text. Among its several lexicographical meanings are spring, eye, source, quintessence, essence, in addition to being used to express the meaning of identity, as in one's saying, "The thing itself," or, "This is identical with that." William Chittick, who has translated this term as "entity", has this to say about *'ayn*:

In its technical sense as "entity", the term refers to specificity, particularization, and designation. What sets one thing apart from another thing? The *'ayn*s of the two things…
Entities are, on the one hand, the possible things as they exist in the cosmos, and on the other hand, the possible things non-existent in the cosmos but existent in God's knowledge. If many translators have rendered *'ayn* as "archetype", this is because God creates in accordance with His eternal knowledge of it. Thereby He gives each thing known by Him—each entity "immutably fixed" (*thabit*) within His knowledge—existence in the universe… There is no difference between the entity known in God's knowledge and the entity in the cosmos except that in the first case it is "non-existent" while in the second case it is "existent". The immutable entity (*'ayn thabitah*) and the existent entity (*'ayn mawjudah*) are the same reality, but one exists in the cosmos while the other does not.[2]

Elsewhere Chittick points out that *'ayn* is basically synonymous with "thing" (*shay'*), "thing" being

"one of the most indefinite of indefinites (*min ankar al-nakirat*)," since it can be applied to anything whatsoever, existent or non-existent…
The "existent things" are creatures in the cosmos (though never ceasing to be non-existent objects of God's knowledge). The "non-existent things" are objects of knowledge, also called the "immutable entities".[3]

The question arises as to how to reconcile *'ayn* as being a term referring to specificity, particularization, and designation while at the same time viewing it as being synonymous with "the most indefinite of indefinites". It is true that every "thing" is an *'ayn*, and it is also true that every *'ayn* is a "thing". That is to say, everything in the world is an *'ayn* that has been made to exist or has been manifested.

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[2] Sufi Path of Knoweldge, pp. 83-84
[3] Ibid., pp.11-12

Similarly, every immutable *'ayn* is a non-existent or non-manifest thing, a some-thing that has yet to exist as a cosmic being.

However, it is not enough that both *'ayn* and thing can be applied to any object whatsoever, be it existent or non-existent, to make *'ayn* and "thing" synonymous. Although there is a certain synonymy between *'ayn* and *shay'* in designating existent objects as such and non-existent objects as such, the similarity disappears when one is considering the relationship between an existent and that same entity in its state of non-existence. That is to say, when considering some non-existent alone as an object of God's knowledge it is certainly a thing, while an externalized or manifested object of God's creative Act is a thing as well. However, the relationship of an existential object and the *'ayn* of which it is an existentiation is not properly described as that of one thing to another, because indeed they are the same thing. A created object's immutable *'ayn* is, from one point of view, itself. They are identical.

In my translation of the *Ringstones*, I have chosen to render *'ayn* in its technical sense as "identity". Firstly, the immutable *'ayn*s are forms (*surah*) in God's knowledge. Form is used here in the sense of essence (*dhat*), of the 'what it is' of a thing. This is one reason why some have translated *'ayn* as essence, and Ibn al-'Arabi himself often substitutes *dhat* (essence) for *'ayn* (identity). The concept of essence or form is basically synonymous with the definition of identity as, "The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a thing is itself and not something else."[4] Identity in this sense, like form or essence, is that which makes a thing what it is as opposed to what it is not. Moreover it adequately conveys the notions of specificity, particularity, and designation. Secondly, the *'ayn* of something is that with which it is identical. It is the very thing or the thing itself. The use of "identical with" is clear enough, but there is also a rare usage of identity as "the self-same thing". Thus identity can also be used to convey the relationship of an existent entity and its non-existent *'ayn*. We are an externalization of our true identity. Thirdly, another rare usage assigns identity the meaning of "personal or individual existence". To be an *'ayn* is, in one usage, to have a concrete existence or to be a reality outside of the mind. "To have identity" can properly be read as the equivalent of *fi'l-'ayn* ("in *'ayn*"), which can also be correctly rendered as "concrete". In general, "identity" carries with it a certain dimension of inwardness and transcendence, and it enshrines the meanings of essence, sameness, and individual nature, all of which are inherent to Ibn al-'Arabi's use of *'ayn*.

As for the adjectival form *'ayni*, we have chosen to render this as concrete as opposed to using a derivative of identity. *'Ayni* is a universal Islamic philosophical term referring to that which exists on its own outside of the mind or to that which has external, manifested existence. In the first case *'ayni* signifies a demarcation between

[4] The definitions here are taken from *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

subject and object, and is usually contrasted with *dhihni*, or mental. In the second case it signifies a demarcation between the intellectual or non-manifest and the externally manifested objects of the world, and it is usually contrasted with *'aqli* or intellectual. In what sense *'ayni* is meant must be discerned from the context, but both senses are conveyed by concrete.

In the opening sentence one can understand the phrase "their identities" in one of two ways. The first is a reading of identity as the essence particular to each Name, meaning that the Real willed to see each essence or very self of each Divine Name. The second is to understand "their" as signifying an ontological dependence, meaning that the Real willed to see the identities that belong ultimately to the Names. Understood in the first way, the identities of the Names are their very own identities or essences and do not refer to anything above or below the ontological level of the Divine Names. Understood in the second way they are forms in God's knowledge, which as we have seen carry the name "immutable identities". Ibn al-'Arabi tells us that he could have equally well said that the Real willed to see His own Identity. The equivalence of the vision of the identities and the vision of the Identity is based on the oneness of the Named. Infinite as the Most Beautiful Names may be, they can only name a single Identity, and as we shall see the identities themselves express the Names of God. Each identity is a Name of *the* Identity, and so to see the totality of identities is really none other than to see the only Identity.

Each immutable identity is a form (*surah*) of a Divine Quality or Name in the knowledge of God, which is to say that God has knowledge of Himself or of His Names. The Names being infinite, the identities are also infinite. The Divine Names themselves are arrayed in a hierarchy, each possessing its own unique scope or domain. Names such as the Holy (*al-Quddus*), the Real (*al-Haqq*), and the All-Merciful (*al-Rahman*) denote the Essence as such, while Names such as the Clement (*al-Halim*) and the Subtle (*al-Latif*) are meant to denote Qualities, while still other Names such as the Creator (*al-Khaliq*) and the Giver of Death (*al-Mumit*) denote Acts of God. Moreover, certain Names are conditions for other Names owing to the conditionality of the Qualities. Knowledge is a condition for Will, and Will for Power. That is to say, God cannot will unless He knows, and He cannot exercise His power unless He has a will to do so. Other Names such as the First, the Last, the Inward, and the Outward are conditioned by relationality, since the presence of one demands the presence of its counterpart. God as the Real is more encompassing than God as Creator, while the scope of the Creator is greater than that of the Giver of Life or the Giver of Death. In the case of the First or the Last, the limitation is scope stems from the very relationship of one Name to another.

Between any two Divine Names that we are able to articulate there stand an infinite number of Names that we cannot or do not. The midpoint between any two Divine Names is itself a Divine Name, and midway between the latter and anyone of

the first two is yet another Divine Name, and so on ad infinitum. The Names we know are as it were a representative sample from amongst the infinite totality. Qaysari employs the imagery of Divine Names joining to beget other Names, which then join together to beget still others. This imagery is not to suggest that the un-articulated Names are somehow derivative of the articulated ones, because all are equally Names of God. Their essential differences lie in their scope and in their conditionality upon one another. They are not determined by the way we as contingent beings employ them. Thus, the Just-Creator is in its reality a single Name, and the Just-Creator-Clement is another Name, equally as much as the other. The compounding is conceptual and comes from the standpoint of the human mind.

Now, certain Names have a scope that is precisely that of a single individual. Any individual identity can be seen as a unique combination of Divine Names. However, any "combination" of Divine Names is in reality itself a unique Divine Name; we only call it a combination or interplay because we begin conceptually from the starting point of a finite set of Names. As noted above, this finitude is a function of the intelligence and imagination, not the Divine Nature. If, however, we take the known Divine Names as indicative or symbolic of the totality, it is then helpful to envisage each identity as expressing a unique interplay of these Names. Now, the Divine Names are such that some have a scope that corresponds to an individual and some have a scope that encompasses many individuals. God knows all of these Names, which is why the immutable identities include both universals and particulars. Identities share qualities, each of which is a unique Divine Name, but at the same time each identity captures a unique "set" of qualities, which is also a unique Divine Name. This is how the immutable realm contains both the universal and particular. The Divine Name that determines the immutable identity is sometimes spoken of as the 'lord' of that identity.

The infinity of Divine Names as such is not enough, however, to account for the presence of the immutable identities. For God as such the Names name a unique Named. The Divine Essence is a Self or Subject that own its Qualities. Now, there must be something that accounts for the fact that from the Divine Names as Qualities of God there is made real that which is not they. That is to say, by definition a form in God's knowledge is not the very same thing as a Divine Name. That which makes real the presence of the immutable identities and establishes the link between it and the presence of the Names is the self-disclosure (*tajalli*) of God. It is through God's self-disclosure that there comes into being entities that are not God's Names but forms in God's knowledge which are determined[5] by these Names. In Itself the

[5] Determination translates *hukm*. *Hukm* is one of those Arabic words, like *'ayn*, that allow of a myriad of different translations. It can mean judgment, decision, regulation, status, wisdom, decree, and control. In our translation of the Fusus we have chosen to render *hukm* as determination. The common thread running through the shades of meaning of *hukm* is the notion of an agent determining an object. The first determines (*hakim*) while the second is determined (*mahkum 'alayh*). In a judgment or

Essence or Self is All-Possibility, but in order for its Names to be other than the Qualities of the single Self the Self must give of itself in order for there to come into being other subjects that will bear these qualities. To say All-Possibility is not to suggest that there is any potentiality in God, for God is pure actuality. God is All-Possibility in relation to that which is not God. All-Possibility is the Pure Actuality by virtue of which the potentialities of the world can pass from their state of potentiality into actuality.[6] Each identity or form in God's knowledge is a reflection of God's Qualities, but at the center of this identity is a reflection of God's Self, without which there would be nothing beyond the Divine Names of the Divine Self. Any quality requires a subject to bear that quality, just as any name must belong to that which it names. That essence or 'what-it-is' of the identity is sustained by the qualities form which its own qualities derive, but *that it is*, such as to be what it is, results from the disclosure of the Self.[7] God is He who Knows (*al-'alim* or *al-'alim*) as an entailment of being He who is the Self, since the Named is One, which is to say that it is as a result of the Self *being* Itself *as* Knower that the immutable identities *are*. They are not purely and simply identical with the Self as such, and yet to say "the Knower" is to say "the Self knows", though to say "the Self knows" is not to say "the Self as such". This act of the Self knowing itself eternally, which is what the

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decision, one "makes a determination", while in the case of a decree or of control the object's status or actions are determined by another. This is general a *hukm* can be seen as some particular instance of determination.

The Divine Names determine everything that is ontologically dependent upon them. The ontological dependence of the qualities of things is precisely the determination of the Qualities over them or in them. In order for there to be a determination, that is, in order for the determination of the Names to be manifest, there must be an object that can receive this determination. This function is fulfilled by the immutable identities and all of the levels below them. Thus, any quality possessed by any identity can be thought of as a determination, that is, of the influence (sultan, another word Ibn al-'Arabi uses to describe the determination or control of the identities by the Names) of a particular Quality over the mode of being of a particular identity. This vertical relationship is also expressed in the language of "effect" (*athar*). Any quality possessed by an identity is an effect of a Divine Name or Quality. The question in *hukm* is: who or what make a particular quality what it is? That is to say, by virtue of what or with respect to what is a quality made to be possessed by a particular identity? In itself, a particular individual can be said to possess a quality of mercy. From a certain point of view, this mercy is spoken of as a determination, both because it is made to be so by that which determines it and because we make a determination, as a conceptual act, that this quality is present in this individual. That is, a determination is both what a thing is made to be as well as that which we say about it. In the Fusus, although "determination" often designates a quality, it is not synonymous with quality. In a sense, it can be read as an ongoing "act of determination" or as the "power of determination", but both of these senses are present in the word itself so we have refrained from translating it as such.

[6] That is, because a thing in potency cannot pass into actuality without the prior presence of a thing which is already actual.

[7] There are thus two ways of looking at a being's archetypal reality for Ibn al-'Arabi. The first is the Name from which the identity originates, which Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes calls the "lord" of a particular being. The second is the immutable identity, which is that being in its state of immutability. Some authors such as Corbin have assigned the name archetype to the immutable identity, while Chittick has contended that the notion of archetype of closer to the idea of the Divine Names and Qualities. It seem most useful, when dealing with Ibn al-'Arabi, to simply speak of an individual's archetypal reality while acknowledging the two-tiered nature of this concept as it appears in the Shaykh's metaphysics.

Self *is* from a certain point of view, constitutes the very reality of the immutable identities. This does not to introduce multiplicity into the Divine Nature anymore than does the plurality of Names. When we speak of the Self in Itself, we must stop and say no more. However, when we speak of the Self in a certain respect we must discern the entailments of the Name or Quality which come into view as a result. We must acknowledge what is implied by the very essence of a Quality, barring which the Quality would not be what it is. Thus, God cannot be the Knower without the essential entailments of this Quality as it applies to Him. God discloses Himself by being Himself, by being what He is. If we consider this from the point of view of the Self as such, there are no separate entities since the Self ceases not to be Itself. However, from the point of view of the identities, the Self has disclosed Itself to make real these identities, whose selfhood is not the Supreme Selfhood when each of these is considered separately, but which is none other than the Self when seen as being a result of the Self's very act of being Itself in a certain aspect. God cannot know by ceasing to be Himself, and so the forms in His Knowledge must have an ontological link with Him while still being other than the Names and Qualities themselves. Precisely because it is the Self that discloses It will always remain Itself, while the reality of its own disclosure makes real the selves to which Its disclosure gives rise. To say that these are entailments of the Essence is to say that the Self, by its very nature—that is to say, in being Itself—discloses Itself such that from a certain perspective many derivative and separate selves result, while from another perspective it is precisely because this apparent multiplicity of independent selves is the result of the Self being Itself that the Self never undergoes any division and never becomes multiple. To say that the self-disclosure of God introduces multiplicity into the Divine Unity is to say that in being Itself the Self ceases to be Itself, which would be absurd. This coming to be of the immutable identities is sometimes called the Holiest Emanation (*al-fayd al-aqdas*), while the existentiation of these identities in the world of manifestation is called the Holy Emanation (*al-fayd al-muqaddas*). The former is also called the invisible self-disclosure (*tajalli al-ghayb*), and the latter the visible self-disclosure (*tajalli al-shahadah*).

"…In a comprehensive being that comprises the entire affair due to its having taken on existence."

It is helpful at this point to speak of the doctrine of divine presences. A presence (*hadrah*) is a way in which God is present. In this sense presence is almost synonymous with *wujud*, which can also be translated in some contexts as "presence". Each presence is determined by a Divine Name, which is to say that every Divine Name represents a way in which God is present. Among the most important distinctions between presences to be found in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi is that

between the presence of Unity (*ahadiyyah*) and the presence of Oneness (*wahidiyyah*). The first refers to the utter unity of the Divine Self beyond any polarizations or opposition. The second presence is when God is first "identified" (*ta'ayyana*) and is known through his Divine Names and Qualities. *Ta'ayyun* has a reflexive sense which can be understood as God's first Act of naming Himself. By naming Himself again and then again eternally all things come to be. In a sense, to pass from Unity to Oneness is akin to the transition from "God" to "God is One". The self-identification or self-naming of the Divine Self is like unto the difference between "I" and "I am". Now, for God to name Himself is quite a different matter than for us to name ourselves. God's act of naming Himself makes up our very reality; one must read the aforementioned distinction between "I" and "I am" in an allusive and symbolic way. What is to be remembered is that as soon as one says, "God is this way," or, "This is God," one is talking about some Quality or other; as soon as one starts identifying or naming things we have left the presence of the Supreme Self. This self-identification or auto-determination as it has also been called can also be remembered as the introduction of the relationship between God and the world, or God and "what is other than God" (*ma siwa'Llah*). The doctrine of presences means that the Self *as such*, in being Itself, is the Self as *such and such* in innumerable ways. In each respect in which God is such and such gives rise to the world being such and such in a corresponding and necessary way.

As was said above, self-identification or self-naming is an entailment of the reality of the Self. That is to say, it is precisely because the Self is being Itself that the Self names or identifies Itself to give rise to the presence of Oneness, the presence of the Divine Names and Qualities. One does not stop there, however, for each one of the infinite Names carries with it its own entailments. That is, for these Names to be precisely what they are there must come to be that which is essentially entailed by them. This was discussed with respect to God's being the Knower. It applies to the other Qualities as well, each in its own unique way. It must not be understood from this that things come to be through some sort of mathematical or even mechanical unfolding of an initial potentiality. It is true that God cannot be other than God, but God is He-who-wills (*al-Murid*), and the Divine Will is one of the Divine Qualities and carries with it certain entailments. What is entailed by the Divine Will is none other than the fact that God is not constrained in being God. Indeed God creates; this is essential. But it is equally essential that God creates as He wills. There is no contradiction in this. It is a misunderstanding of Ibn al-'Arabi's metaphysics to mistake his emphasis on the determining power of the immutable identities over the destinies of beings as a devaluation of the Will, making it into some sort of metaphor. Without perfect freedom the Self is no longer Itself. Moreover, will is a real and essential aspect of individual identities. To over-emphasize the theme of determinism

is to pick and choose aspects of the Essence arbitrarily, destroying the value in seeing all of reality as the eternal act of the Self being Itself.

A being in the world can only be referred to as *a* being, as an 'itself', by virtue of the disclosure of the very Self Itself, while its qualities are a disclosure or emanation of the Qualities of the Self. Considered in the first respect, each being or self is in a sense immutable and inviolable, because no matter how deeply one may plunge an object that spark of selfhood that lies at its center will remain forever inaccessible. A self or subject is not an object, by definition, which is to say that the very self of a being is that mystery which is known only to it and to God. To truly know my selfhood as such one would have to *be* me, which demonstrates the immutability of the self. One can view each selfhood as a radius of a circle. None of the radii ever meet except at the center. These radii symbolize the presence of Selfhood at the center of all things.

Now, it is not truly possible to separate the disclosed self from the qualities it will bear. The Divine Name that is its Lord provides it with everything which makes it what it is. The immutable identity contains all of its possible qualities within itself in eternity. That is to say, as soon as there is an identity, there is everything that the identity is or can possibly be, on pain of turning it into another identity altogether. This is why Ibn al-'Arabi says that it is only for God to say *Be!* to a thing in order for it to exist, for it carries this possibility of existence as a part of its identity, its very essence. In this sense the existentiation comes from the side of the identity, while the command to *Be!* comes from the side of the Divine. Another way of saying this is that the Holy Emanation is already contained as it were in the Holiest Emanation, or that existentiation is a self-disclosure of a self-disclosure. The hierarchical unfolding of an identity is none other than an intrinsic or essential consequence of the qualities it itself *is* or is made up of.

Now, these qualities of an identity are not unique to that identity, but are possessed by others as well. God is present in many beings through the same Name or Quality, the totality of instances where this Quality is present thus constituting the presence of this Divine Name. Many beings are merciful, but there is only one All-Merciful whose presence in these beings is the very reality of their mercy. This is why the presence of Unity has only one instance, so long as we do not understand this as a purely numerical oneness; Unity must be unique. In the world it is the presences of the Names that make possible the coming together of beings, allowing each identity to form a link with others without destroying its own selfhood. It is with respect to and by virtue of the Name that determines the common aspect of two identities that their coming together is possible. By coming together we mean that the two identities can have some sort of interaction with each other, which is none other than the *presence* of one identity to another through some quality or aspect that the two have in common. When I perceive something in the world, this act of

consciousness is none other than the quality out there being present to that very same quality which I carry in my own soul. Here a union or unification takes place between the subject and the object with respect to and by virtue of the quality that they share. The quality in the object and the quality in the subject stem from the presence of a Divine Name which is lord to that quality. A hammer strikes a rock by virtue of being present to that rock. They are able to occupy the same realm such as to interact because of their common aspects. Man has these aspects as well, by which he can not only be conscious of the rock but also can wield the hammer. In some respect his hand has the same presence as the hammer, or one can say that in some respect his hand and the hammer are part of the same presence. There are as many presences as there are Names, which is why there is a hierarchy of ways in which one identity can be present to another, from the human soul's consciousness of essences to the hammer's shattering of the rock.

From out of this infinity of presences a small number are often employed to designate the fundamental degrees of reality. In the language of the Akbarian school they are known as the universal divine presences. They owe their universality to the fact that each of them is a manifestation of the totality of Divine Names and Qualities according to a certain mode, a certain way of being. The realm of immutability can be seen as the totality of Divine Names in the presence of the Inward (*al-Batin*, or the Hidden or Non-manifest) while the corporeal world can be seen as this same totality in the Presence of the Outward or Manifest (*al-Zahir*). Between these lie the realm of spirit, with the realm of the soul falling in between the spiritual world and the corporeal world. They can be seen as the presences of the Names 'begotten' of the joining of the Hidden and the Manifest. This hierarchy obviously is a function of the hierarchy of Names in terms of their scope, conditionality, and relation. The realm of spirits manifests in and controls the realm of the soul, and the realm of the soul manifests in and controls the realm of bodies.

A universal presence can be viewed as a coming together of beings or identities which is enabled by the Names which they all share. All beings possessing the quality of manifest, when this is actualized, will present themselves to one another by virtue of it and as determined by this mode of being. Thus a universal presence or degree of reality is not some sort of pre-existing container into which beings enter, but the matrix or weave formed when they are all actualized together, the common Name or Quality manifesting as the pattern that arises from this coming together. This common Name is the organizing principle for the interaction of these identities, not from outside of them but as an intrinsic part of them. In the manifest world it is by virtue of my identity's aspect of manifestation that I can exist in the same (manifest) world as the manifest aspect of you. I also possess aspects of non-manifestation or inwardness, and with respect to my inwardness I interact in the inward world with the inward aspect of other identities. The conditions that

characterize a given presence will be an intrinsic aspect of each and every identity in that presence. From one point of view a presence (or degree of reality) owes its existence as such to the collectivity of identities viewed in a special respect. From another point of view this quality, through essentially and properly possessed by these identities, is ultimately and at root a Name of God, and is thus transcendent and ordering. God brings together a presence or mode of reality through none other than the very qualities of the identities that will occupy it.

The "comprehensive being" spoken of by Ibn al-'Arabi is Perfect Man. In the human soul as such, which begins where the animal soul ends, the Divine Qualities are manifest as its virtues and powers, and it is in his soul that man is the one identity in which every Divine Name manifests. This is why he is said to be made in the Image of God. By virtue of his totality every quality possessed by any object in the world is by definition possessed by man, who is thus not only the Image of God but is the replica (*nuskhah*) of the world. As is mentioned in the first Ringstone, the world is the Great Man, while man is a small world: man is *al-'alam al-saghir* (microcosm, "small world") and the world is *al-'alam al-kabir* (macrocosm, "great world"). This relationship can be puzzling at first because the soul of man does not bear the slightest resemblance, it would seem, to the world at large. The world is full of colors, sounds, and shapes, but the soul is none of these.

The apparent disparity is resolved if one applies the doctrine of presences. One must remember that the virtues and powers of the human soul are not realities that belong to the human state alone. Each of the Divine Qualities is a unique reality that is present in many levels and modes. The Qualities which are present in the soul as its virtues and powers are present everywhere in the world. At the center of all his qualities is man's Heart, and just as his qualities are expressions of the Divine Qualities, so too is his Heart an expression the Divine Essence or Self. As the Divine Qualities are none other than qualities of the Divine Self, so too are the virtues and powers of man none other than qualities of his own unique Heart. Man's Heart is that one identity in which every Divine Name has a share, which is why man is a universal presence unto himself. While the other universal presences express the totality of God's Qualities through the many identities that have a place in that presence, the fully awakened soul of man expresses every Divine Quality in a single, living self. His spiritual, intellectual, and emotional powers are all aspects of a single, integrated consciousness. The other presences are like various intertwining circumferences, while man is a radius that cuts across them all. The world as a whole expresses the totality of the Divine Qualities through many identities, each one possessing a certain scope but none of them achieving the wholeness of man. In being fully awake to his own reality, Perfect Man knows the totality through the totality, where each quality in his soul infuses every other in a simultaneity which, instead of denaturing the qualities and turning man into an amorphous

conglomeration, allows each aspect of the soul to be enriched and brought to life by its other aspects. Such is the nature of the soul of man. The world is different, for therein man sees the totality in a totality, but in a static and dynamic succession of qualities which unfolds the possibilities of manifestation precisely by presenting the original wholeness according to various modes of limitation. In the world the qualities appear together in things in such a way that their isolation and diminished scope, in terms of expressing the wholeness of the Divine Qualities, is precisely what allows them to unfold and display the realities found 'enfolded' in the reality of man. Color, sound, rhythm, shape, and even taste and smell are domains which display the central domain that is man, the way white light can be diffracted through a prism to reveal the colors of the spectrum. Each domain, in its own unique way, represents the possibilities of manifestation. It is as it were a one-dimensional microcosm expressing, in limited fashion, the multi-dimensional range of the human soul. Each part of this range of possibilities expresses, as dictated by the very nature of its domain, some aspect of the human reality. Moreover, the relationships between these various manifestations echo the interweaving of the qualities with the soul of man. It is as though man were the circle, and all the realities of the world unfolded the reality of man the way the various polygons and ovals which can be formed by the points on a circle manifest the possibilities of the circle by actualizing limitations of the perfect whole.

This is not meant to impose an ethical or emotional content upon the qualities the world, or to see man's highest possibilities only in terms of his basic virtues and abilities. In the worldview of Ibn al-'Arabi the deepest reality of man is far more profound than what we have come to understand as human. Man is an ethical and emotional being as a function of a fundamental ontological root of which his moral qualities and emotional states or sensations are expressions. Such qualities and states betray their non-central status by the fact of coming and going and by being subject to the influence of the world as it is encountered by the soul. For most men, this deepest and truest center lies mostly hidden, known only through its expressions and reverberations in the states and qualities that make up most of human experience. Veiled from himself, man will usually fail to see himself in the world and the world in himself. Possessing only the vaguest center, his states and qualities run in a succession which he is often at pains to see in terms of unity and order. In such a state it is difficult for him to see his own qualities mirrored in the world around him. The true relationship of man to the world is that of a synthesis to an unfolding, of a wholeness to a providential fragmentation. When man is whole the beings of the world will find their center in man and man will find himself everywhere in the world. When man identifies himself with his 'merely human' states and is veiled from his center, man himself is fragmented and the complementariness and harmony between the synthesis and its unfolding is destroyed. Man will always have a true

center, but when he searches for it or establishes it where it is not, multiple shadow-centers will appear in the periphery of his soul, the way a central object is manifested in a house of mirrors. Alternating between various false centers in this stream of states and experiences, the soul of man is trapped in various limitations and particularizations of his true self. It is that true center which is truly the Image of God, an expression of the totality of the Divine Names and Qualities. In the fully realized man, this center and its manifestations in the periphery of the soul are fully present to one another. The synthesis of the Divine Image then penetrates the whole of the soul whose states, qualities, and experiences then take on a transparency in relation to its deepest center and also in relation with the world.

It can be seen, then, that man's most inward or transcendent reality is itself the principle by which all things in the world, including himself, are made to exist. The spirit of man is none other than the Spirit of all things, because no aspect of the Spirit is absent from him. From a certain point of view it is the entire cosmos including man that is the Image of God, comprising both the central and the peripheral, both the vertical and the horizontal. This Spirit also appears under various other names, such as the Supreme Pen (*al-qalam al-a'la*) and the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqiqah al-Muhammadiyyah*). It is this reality by which all things are made to exist and possess life, man and all things besides. In this respect the Spirit is above or transcends the world and is its source. However, within the world it is in the soul of man that the totality of the Spirit is restated and the cosmos is given a center, of which its peripheral manifestations are complementary reflections. Thus both the world as such and then man alone can be seen as manifestations of the Spirit, as Images of God. The world is a 'complete' manifestation of the Spirit while man is 'total', the difference being that between unfolding and synthesis.

Translation of Ibn al-Arabi's

Fusus al-Hikam

Introduction

In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise be to God, who by the unity of the path of the peoples and from the most eternal station makes wisdom descend into the hearts of the perfect, even though sects and communities, owing to the diversity of peoples, may differ. May God bless the one who gives strength to will[8] from the treasures of generosity and nobility and by the most upright words, and who is Muhammad, and may He bless his Family and his Companions, and grant them peace.

To proceed: I saw the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, in a dream which I had during the last ten days of Muharram within the walls of Damascus in the year six hundred and twenty-seven.[9] In his hand, may God bless him and grant him peace, was a book, and he said unto me, "This is the book of the Ringstones of Wisdom. Take hold of it, and with it go out to the people so that they may benefit from it." I said, "I hear and obey God, His Messenger, and the men of authority among us, as we have been commanded." And so I realized my hope, made my faithful intention, and purified my purpose and resolution to present this book as set out to me by the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, with neither addition nor omission. I ask God to make me one of His slaves over whom Satan has no power, and to bestow favor upon me in what my fingers write, what my tongue utters, and what my heart contains, through the glorious dictation and the exhalation of the spirit into the breathing heart, with a giving of strength that will protect me, so that I may be an interpreter[10] and not dictate over it, and so that whosoever from amongst the Folk of God[11] and the Companions of the Heart who occupy themselves with it will realize that it comes from a station of holiness, far removed from those designs of the soul which are granted entrance by deception. I ask that, when the Real hears my supplication, He respond to my call. I set forth only what has been set forth unto me, and I set down in this manuscript only what has descended unto me. I am neither prophet nor messenger, but an heir,[12] and my afterlife shall reap.

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[8] *Himmah*, a word I translate as a technical term as willpower. In a general way *himmah* means resolution, ambition, or zeal, but as a technical term it refers to the spiritual traveler's intensity of striving on the spiritual path, and his ability to bring his will to bear on an object.

[9] Approximately mid-December, 1229.

[10] *Mutarjim*, active participle of *tarjumah* or "translation". The meanings of this word in Arabic are not limited to the rendering from one language into another. It also carries the meaning of presenting something for explanation. Often the introduction to a book is called the *tarjumah*. In the broadest sense, it carries the sense of someone who retells something so that it can be better understood. "Interpreter" is sometimes used to designate a prophet or messenger, meaning someone who "translates" spiritual and divine realities and presents them to people in a language they can understand.

[11] "Folk of" (*ahl* s.o.) or "people of" is a common motif in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi. When he uses such phrases as "Folk of God", "Folk of Unveiling", "Folk of the Realities", Ibn al-'Arabi is always referring to the Sufis.

[12] An heir of the prophets and messengers. This is an allusion to the tradition, "The men of knowledge (*'ulama'*) are the heirs of the prophets." (Bukhari 3:10)

Hear thou what from God doth come
And unto God do thou return
And when thou hearest that with which
I come to thee, preserve it!
Then with understanding do unfold
Enfolded sayings, then unite
Then bestow upon the ones who
Seek it, offering them no hindrance
This mercy I extend to thee
Do thou extend it likewise

I ask God to be amongst those who receive strength and thus are strengthened, and to be bound by the purifying Law of Muhammad, becoming thus bound as well as one who binds, and that we be resurrected in his company, just as we were made one of his community.[13] And now, the beginning of what the master set forth to the slave of it:

Ringstone[14] of the Divine Wisdom in the Word of Adam

The Real willed, glorified be He, in virtue of His Beautiful Names, which are innumerable, to see their identities—if you so wish you can say: to see His Identity—in a comprehensive being[15] that comprises the whole affair[16] insofar as it is possessed of existence and His Mystery is manifest to Himself through it.[17] For the vision a

[13] That is, to be raised on the Day of Judgment together with the Prophet.
[14] *Fass* pl. *fusus*. Scholars have have disagreed over the proper translation of this word. This is discussed in the Ringstone of Shu'ayb, p.***.
[15] Throughout this translation "being" translates *kawn*, which literally means "being" but which in the general practice of Ibn al-'Arabi and his school refers to being insofar as it belongs to the world and not to God. Thus "bringing into being" (*takwin*) usually refers specifically to coming to be of an entity in the world. "Existence", which is how I translate *wujud*, can refer to God or to the world. This distinction between being and existence should always be kept in mind in reading the *Ringstones*. At times, I use "being$_w$" to translate *wujud*, in which case it appears with the subscript w.
[16] 'Affair' (*amr*) is an extremely general word which, when it does not mean 'command' or 'order', can mean 'entity', 'thing', and can also be used in the way that in English we would say 'things' in a very general way, such as, "That is how things are," or, "That is the nature of things," in which case *amr* can also mean 'reality'. The "whole affair" means 'everything' or 'reality' or 'all things'.
[17] The commentators mention a saying attributed to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, "He sees, though there be no object in His creation to see." This means that God knows Himself in an absolute, unqualified way that stands in no need of creation or manifestation. He knows (sees) Himself and all things eternally and everlastingly. However, to know all things in a qualified and relative manner there needs to exist that which is relative and qualified. If God wishes to see Himself in manifestation, as it were in a mirror, then this mirror must exist for this act of knowledge to take place. The totality and infinity of

thing has of itself in itself is not like the vision a thing has of itself in another thing, which will be like a mirror for it; indeed, He is manifest to Himself in a form accorded by the locus seen, which would not have manifested to Him without the existence of that locus and His self-disclosure to it.[18]

God had existentiated the entire world as a homogeneous form in which there was no spirit, and which was thus like an unpolished mirror.[19] Intrinsic to the divine governance is to prepare no place that does not receive a divine spirit, which He referred to as the 'breathing' into it.[20] This is none other than the realization of that form's preparedness,[21] it having been made ready to receive the emanation of the perpetual self-disclosure that has not ceased, nor ever will cease. There abides but a receptacle, which comes from His Holiest Emanation.[22] All things, from their first to their last, come from Him. *And to Him the whole affair shall be returned*,[23] just as it began with Him. The situation required that the mirror of the world be clear, and

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God's knowledge demands that He know Himself in an absolute way, which is totally beyond need of the world, and also in a relative and qualified way, which presupposes the existence of the world. The vision a thing has of itself in itself is not like its vision in another thing, and God's knowledge of Himself in Himself is not like His knowledge of Himself in Perfect Man and in all the beings of the world. The absolute is not the qualified, which does not take away the absoluteness of the absolute but does place upon it the limitation of not being qualified. As Ibn al-'Arabi will have occasion to point out time and time again in the *Ringstones*, it is in encompassing both the absolute and the qualified that God is truly God.

Perfect Man "encompasses the whole affair" as a possessor of existence, and existence here is used in the qualified sense of possessing manifestation as opposed to abiding in the realm of immutability in God's knowledge and hence remaining unmanifested. Man's special purpose is that he is a comprehensive being who is not God Himself, and so God can manifest His Mystery to Himself through man. God already knew His Mystery in Himself without something else. This being, man, possesses existence in the world and in this special respect (which is why he says "insofar as") provides God with a mirror to contemplate His own Mystery.

[18] This is an explanation of the difference between the two kinds of seeing: seeing oneself in oneself and seeing oneself in another thing. God sees Himself differently when He is manifest to Himself through something, and the way in which He appears to Himself (that is, the "form") will be determined by the nature of the mirror (which is "the locus seen"). Without the existence of the mirror and without His self-disclosure to the mirror He would not be able to contemplate Himself in the mirror.

It should be recalled that from one point of view the mirror is none other than God Himself, for all things are none other than entailments of the Self being Itself. It is from our point of view that we speak of God and the world, but from the point of view of the Supreme Self there is only the Self.

[19] This refers to the world as considered separate from man. The macrocosm is a domain of manifestation for the infinity of Divine Qualities, but without man there is no being therein that unites all the Qualities together as a manifestation of the Name *Allah*. The world is a theater of manifestation for all the Qualities, but only man is a manifestation of the all-comprehensive Name *Allah*. This is why Ibn al-'Arabi likens the world without man to a homogeneous form and unpolished mirror.

[20] A reference to the Quranic verse, *Then He shaped him, and breathed His spirit into him…* (32:9)

[21] The breathing here is identified with the Holiest Emanation, which is none other than the preparedness of a being to receive the Holy Emanation. It is the Holy Emanation, the self-disclosure of the visible, which is perpetual and will never cease.

[22] That is to say, the Holiest Emanation, the self-disclosure of the invisible, brings about a receptacle. It is a receptacle or recipient in the sense that it stands prepared to receive the Holy Emanation, the self-disclosure of the visible.

[23] 11:123

Adam was the very clearness of this mirror and the spirit of this form.

The angels are the various faculties of this form, which is the form of the world, referred to as the Great Man in the terminology of the Folk.[24] In relation to it the angels are like the spiritual and sensory faculties in the makeup of man. Each of these faculties is veiled and cannot see anything superior to itself, and considers there to be something within itself that is worthy of every exalted station and lofty abode with God, due to what each possesses of the Divine Synthesis, which stems from the Divine, from the side of the Reality of realities, and from that which is necessitated by Universal Nature, which latter—in the makeup that bears these qualities—comprises the receptacles of the entire world from its most exalted to its most base aspects.[25] An intellect[26] cannot know this through the explorations of thought, for this kind of perception depends solely upon unveiling, from which one knows the principle of the world's forms which receive His spirits.

And so the aforementioned was called Man and Vicegerent. As for his being Man, it refers to the totality of his makeup and his encompassment of all realities. In relation to the Real man is like the pupil in relation to the eye,[27] through which vision occurs; one calls this the faculty of sight. For this reason he was called Man, and through him the Real looks upon His creation and shows mercy upon them. He is Man, who comes to be[28] and is beginningless, who is perpetual and endless[29] in his

[24] Referring to the Sufis.

[25] This is one of the most difficult sentences in the *Ringstones*. Each of the faculties in man possesses something of the Divine synthesis or totality, but by its own limited nature cannot know that which surpasses it. Each faculty is a particularization or aspect of some subject or consciousness. Were it to comprehend this consciousness it would in fact be at the level of this consciousness and its essence as a particular quality would be destroyed. The synthesis or totality from which each exists can be described as stemming from three aspects. The first one mentioned is the Divine Oneness (*wahidiyyah*), which is the presence of the Divine Names and Qualities. The second is the Reality of realities, which usually refers to the Presence of Unity (*hadrat al-ahadiyyah*). The third aspect which goes into making up this totality is nature (*tabi'ah*), which is the principle (*mabda'*) of activity (*fi'l*) and affection (*infi'al*), and which is the receptacle for the effects (*ta'thirat*) of the Names. "That which is necessitated" refers to the preparedness proper to each faculty. The "makeup" is that of man, and the qualities are those of man. It is the presence of the Perfect Man which encompasses all of the other Divine Presences, from their highest to their lowest. The Divine synthesis (*al-jam'iyyah al-ilahiyyah*) here is the Self (Reality of realities, Being as such) whose Names and Qualities (*al-janab al-ilahi*, the Presence of Oneness) determine what will be received by the creatures of the world (the preparedness which nature necessitates). This triad describes the reality of all things.

[26] Throughout this translation *'aql* is rendered as intellect or intelligence. It can refer to that aspect of the soul which perceives intelligibles as such without any attachment to particular sensible things, be they physical or mental. In this sense it is the spirit conceived as consciousness. However, *'aql* is often used in a qualified way, where it might even be translated as 'reason'. Often Ibn al-'Arabi takes the linguistic sense of *'aqala* ("to bind") and associates it with the limitations of conceptual reasoning in its grasp of the true nature of things. In such instances 'intellect' is opposed to imagination or vision. I have chosen to always translate *'aql* as intellect and leave it to the context to indicate whether the lofty sense or the qualified sense is meant.

[27] *Insan* means both man and the pupil of the eye.

[28] *Hadith* comes from a root which means new or to happen. As a technical term it refers to the fact of being created in time as opposed to being *qadim* or eternal. It is not synonymous with being created since there are created entities (the created Spirit, for example) which are not *hadith*.

makeup, who is the separative and unitive Word, and who is the subsisting[30] of the world through his existence. He is to the world what the ringstone is to the ring,[31] which is the place of the signet and the mark with which the king sets a seal upon his treasures. For this reason was he named Vicegerent, for through him the Real protects His creation, as the seal protects those treasures. No one would dare open them so long as the king's seal was still upon them, unless by his leave. It is thus that he is entrusted with protecting the world. And so the world shall always be protected so long as this Perfect Man is found in it. Do you not see that, when he withdraws and is separated from the storehouses of the lower-world, there shall remain none of what God had stored therein, and that what had been there shall depart away, and that each of the parts shall join one another, and that the affair shall be brought to the Hereafter, over whose coffers he shall be set as an eternal seal?

All of the Names, which are divine forms, are manifested in this makeup of man, and the station[32] of encompassment and synthesis is achieved through his existence. God's argument against the angels stands upon this.[33] Remember that God exhorts you by means of others, so take heed of this example. Indeed, the angels were not aware of what the makeup of this vicegerent accorded him, nor were they aware of the Essence[34] worship made necessary by the presence of the Real, for no one knows anything of God except what is accorded him by his essence. The angels did not possess the synthesis possessed by Adam, and were not aware of the Divine Names by which it is set apart such that they could glorify the Real and proclaim Him holy through them.[35] Nor did they know that God possesses Names to whose knowledge they did not attain, therefore not glorifying Him with them nor

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[29] *Azal* and *abad* both refer to eternity or an endless duration of time, the former in the direction of the past and the latter in the direction of the future.

[30] Literally that by which the world stands, from the verb meaning to stand or to rise.

[31] This symbolism is more fully discussed in the Ringstone of Shu'ayb. (p.***)

[32] *Martabah*, a word which I have translated variously as station, degree, level, and even function. The word generally evokes the sense of hierarchy, of the place of a being in the grand scheme of things. For a discussion of *martabah* and its synonym *rutbah* see *Sufi Path of Knowledge* pp. 47-51.

[33] A reference to the passage discussed below, Qur'an 2:30-34, which reads, *And when thy Lord said to the angels, 'I am setting in the earth a vicegerent.' They said, 'What, wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there, and shed blood, while We proclaim Thy praise and call Thee Holy?' He said, 'Assuredly I know that you know not.' And he taught Adam the names, all of them; then He presented them unto the angels and said, 'Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak truly.' They said, 'Glory be to Thee! We know not save what Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the All-knowing, the All-wise.' He said, 'Adam, tell them their names.' And when he had told them their names He said, 'Did I not tell you I know the invisible things of the heavens and earth? And I know what things you reveal, and what you were hiding.' And when We said to the angels, 'Bow yourselves to Adam'; so they bowed themselves, save Iblis; he refused and waxed proud, and so he became one of the unbelievers.'*

[34] Essence here is an adjective of worship. This same construction is used for Name later in the Ringstone of Seth. The meaning here is not 'essential', but rather that which pertains to the Essence. "Worship of the Essence" would thus be misleading. Here Essence refers to the Divine totality, which is accessible only to man.

[35] Recall that the angels are analogous to the faculties of man. What was said above regarding the limitations of the human faculties is being applied here to the angels.

proclaiming Him holy as did Adam. They were dominated by what we have spoken of, and said of this makeup, *Wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there?*[36] This was nothing but disputation, which was the very thing they disparaged.[37] What they said regarding Adam was the same as what they themselves were engaged in with the Real. Were this not determined by their very makeup they would not have said what they did, unawares, regarding Adam. Had they known themselves they would have known, and had they known they would have been restrained. They would not have continued in their disparagement, to the point of adding to it the claim about their own glorification and proclamation of God's holiness. With Adam there were Divine Names the angels did not possess, so neither their glorification nor their proclamation of His holiness were like those of Adam. The Real related the preceding to us so that we would stop and learn *adab*[38] with God most high, and not become presumptuous about what we have embraced in a limited way. How can we presume to speak of something and apply it universally when we are possessed neither of the state nor of knowledge of it, thus exposing ourselves? This is the Divine Teaching, by which the Real disciplines His slaves and vicegerents, men of *adab* and trust.

Now we return to this Wisdom: Know that universal entities, though not possessing existence in themselves, are still known and intelligible in the mind. They are hidden and always are—with respect to concrete existence—though they have determination and effect in anything having concrete existence.[39] They are in fact identical with them and are not other than they; I refer here to the identities of

[36] 2:30

[37] That is to say, the angels asserted that man would spill blood on earth.

[38] *Adab* is a word which means courtesy, good manners, comportment, and also can be used to refer to a cultivated knowledge of literature. One who has good *adab* knows the proper way of doing things and of dealing with others. It can be thought of as the art of interaction. *Ta'dib*, which means to give *adab* to someone, means 'discipline'.

[39] There are two senses in which concrete is used in this paragraph. In the first sense it refers to that which exists outside of the mind as a real entity in itself, while in the second sense it refers to the realm of manifestation beyond that of the immutable identities. In the first sense the universal is a derivative concept, while in the second sense the universal is the ontological source of many individuals. In the latter sense it refers to a Divine Quality which is the very reality of the qualities of many existent things. This Divine Quality or Name is ontologically prior. In the second sense the priority is a logical one and belongs to the particular individuals who possess various qualities, which is to say that we conceive of life as a quality which is shared among individuals. As a Quality of God "Life" is the very reality of all things insofar as they are living; this is a concrete relationship. At the same time we abstract life as a quality belonging to many individuals; this is a conceptual relationship. Thus the concepts or universals as we think of them are also to be viewed in two ways. A universal is something abstracted from our experience of concrete particulars, but it must be remembered that the very fact of there being a concept corresponding to qualities in the world is based on the aforementioned concrete relationship between the Divine Qualities and concrete instances. In this case the determined individual is the human intelligence. We do indeed abstract universals from the particulars of the world, but this is only possible because the form or essence of this quality is already an essential facet or dimension of the human intelligence, and is actualized upon its presence with the corresponding form or essence in the world. The essence, form, or quiddity which is made universal is a possibility of the human intelligence by virtue of its totality and its ability (in principle) to comprehend all possible essences.

individual existents.[40] They are always intelligible in themselves.[41] They are what is manifest by virtue of the identities of existent things, just as they are what is hidden with respect to their intelligibility. Every concrete existent is dependent upon these universal entities, which cannot be removed from the intellect,[42] and which cannot possess concrete existence; such existence would cause them to cease being intelligible. It is the same whether or not the existent is temporal or non-temporal: the relationship of the temporal and of the non-temporal to the intelligible universal is the same.[43] However, there is a determination of concrete existents which stems from this universal reality as a function of what the realities of these individual existents require, taking for example the relationship of knowledge to the knower, or life to the living thing. Life is an intelligible reality and knowledge is an intelligible reality, distinct from life just as life is distinct from knowledge. Now, we say of the Real most high, that He has Knowledge and Life, and so is the Living and the Knower. Of the angel, we say that it has life and knowledge, and so is a living being and a knower. Of man, we say that he has life and knowledge, and so is a living being and a knower. The reality of knowledge is one, and the reality of life is one, and their relationship to the living being and the knower is the same. Of the knowledge of God, we say that it is eternal, and of the knowledge of man we say that it comes to be. So contemplate what is brought about by the act of placing this determination in relation with this intelligible reality, and contemplate as well the connection between intelligibles and concrete existents. For just as knowledge determines what subsists through it, such that one calls it 'knower', so too does the possessor of the quality determine knowledge as coming to be in the case of what comes to be and eternal in

[40] The qualities possessed by any given identity are none other than that identity. Concretely there is only one entity, although conceptually one introduces multiplicity by saying, for example, "This man is alive." Life is not a separate entity because it is part of the what-it-is or essence of man.

[41] Although from one point of view they are identical or are none other than an individual identity, from another point of view they have an independent existence as concepts, as "objects of intellect" (*ma'qulat*).

[42] Regardless of what happens to the particulars, a universal remains immutable insofar as it is an intelligible (i.e. an object of perception at the level of the intellect).

[43] This alludes to the fact that created beings comprise both the temporal and the non- or supra-temporal. The former are created (*makhluq*) while the latter are originated (*mubda'*). "Origination" here as a technical term refers to that which is brought in to being without intermediary, while created entities (*makhluqat*) are brought into being through the intermediation of the originated entities (*mubda 'at*). The First Intellect or Spirit, for example, is originated, while a given individual in the sensory world, qua its sensory nature, is created through the intermediation of the First Intellect or Spirit. In Sufi metaphysics from a certain standpoint the Spirit is created and from another it is not. If it is considered as created this creation takes place directly, since it is not meditated by any other created entity. This Spirit then functions as *that by which* all things are created. The realm of the spirit or the intellect can be conceptually divided up in several ways, but in all cases it is the realm of origination (*ibda'*) by which the realm of created things comes to be. In this passage what Ibn al-'Arabi is saying is that regardless of the ontological level being considered, the relationship of determination and dependence is the same.

the case of the eternal. Each one is determining and determined.[44]

It is known that these universal realities, although they are intelligible, are non-existent concretely but exist as determination, and are determined when put into relationship with a concrete existent. They allow of determination with respect to individual existents, but they do not allow of division or separation into parts; this is impossible for them. In their essence they are found in everything that is said to possess them, such as 'being a man' being found in every particular individual of that species. It does not thereby become divided, nor does it increase in number with the multiplication of individuals; it remains intelligible. Now, since the link between what possesses concrete existence and what does not possess concrete existence has been established, these being non-existential attributions, then the link of each existent thing to another should be more easily understandable, because in every circumstance involving them there is a unitive factor—namely concrete existence—while in the other case there is no such unitive factor. Since the link exists without this commonalty, then with the commonality it will be stronger and more real.[45]

There is no doubt that the coming to be of the created thing, as well as its needfulness[46] for what brings it into being, is affirmed by the fact that it is, in itself, contingent. Its existence comes from another; it is thus linked to it through its needfulness. It must be the case, then, that what it relies upon be essentially necessary in its existence, that through itself it be beyond need in its existence, and that it not suffer from any needfulness. It is that which, of itself, grants existence to what comes to be, which thus depends upon it, and inasmuch as it[47] is required by it[48] in its essence it is necessary by virtue of it. Moreover, since in its essence it depends upon that from which it manifests, it is necessary that it be in its image[49] in everything in which it depends upon it, be it in Name or in Quality; this is not the case for essential necessity, which is inadmissible for what comes to be. Although it

[44] Because being is one, any Quality of being is also one. All knowledges, if one can state it in this way, are really none other than Knowledge, just as all lives are none other than Life. One of the major themes of the *Ringstones* is the limitation of Divine Reality if it is only considered from the point of view of being absolute. It is in comprising both the absolute and modes of restriction or qualification that reality is perfected. The Shaykh discussed this point more explicitly in the Ringstone of Moses, where he mentions that knowledge is perfected by comprising both the eternal and the becoming. That which comes to be is determining in the sense that the knowledge in an entity that comes to be is, from a certain standpoint, none other than the one reality of Knowledge.

[45] It appears that here the Shaykh is referring to the discussion below regarding contemplating God in oneself and in the world.

[46] In Arabic *faqr* and *iftiqar* express both the state of poverty as such and the state of standing in need of something else. It is in this latter sense, as contrasted with being beyond need (*ghina*) that Ibn al-'Arabi employs these terms.

[47] That is, the thing which comes to be.

[48] That is, that which is beyond need.

[49] That is, that the needful is in the image of that which is beyond need. This means that the qualities of a created thing can be none other than the Qualities of God.

is necessary in its existence, its necessity comes from another, not from itself.[50]

Now, since the affair is as we have said, concerning its[51] manifestation in His Image,[52] and in order for you to acquire knowledge, God most high has turned our attention, concerning our knowledge of Him, to contemplating the created, and has said that He will show us His signs within it. He has shown Himself to us through us. We describe Him by no quality without ourselves being that quality, although this is not the case for that necessity which is unique to the Essence. When we know Him through ourselves and from ourselves, we attribute everything to Him that we attribute to ourselves, and to this point the divine sayings have come down to us on the tongues of the interpreters.[53] He described Himself to us through us. When we witness Him, we witness ourselves, and when He witnesses us, He witnesses Himself. There is no doubt that we are multiple—as individuals and species—and although we all possess a single reality that unites us, we know absolutely that there is a separating factor that distinguishes each of us from the other. If this were not so, there would be no multiplicity in this one entity.[54] Likewise, even if in all respects He describes us as He describes Himself, there must be a differentiating factor, and which is none other than our needfulness for Him in our existence and our existence's dependence upon Him, since we are contingent and since He is beyond need of what we are needful of. This makes beginninglessness and eternity hold good for Him, and this eternity denies Him priority in the sense of the introduction of existence from non-existence. Thus priority is not attributed to Him, although He is the First. This is why He is spoken of as the Last.[55] It cannot be that His priority be that of qualified existence, because it would be inadmissible for Him to be the Last of what is qualified. There is no end to what is contingent, contingent things being infinite, thus having no end. He is only the Last because of the affair in its entirety returning unto Him after its having been attributed to us. He is the Last in His very priority, and is the First in His very finality.

Furthermore,[56] in order for you come to know that the Real has described Himself as being Manifest and Hidden, He existentiated the world as a world of invisible and visible, in order for us to grasp what is hidden through what is invisible

[50] Once a created being is created, its existence is necessary. This necessity is based on God, whose necessity is essential and is by definition not based on anything at all. Such necessity belongs only to God. A created thing is described in terms of contingency (*imkan*) because in itself it can either be or not be, but as soon as it actually *is* it follows logically that it *must* be.
[51] That is, the world.
[52] This refers to the Perfect Man as the image of God. *Surah* is translated as "image" or "form" depending on the context.
[53] "Interpreters" usually refers to the prophets and messengers.
[54] Referring to the aforementioned uniting reality.
[55] That which is sequentially prior cannot also be sequentially posterior. God is both First and Last because He is neither the first of a series of things nor the last of them.
[56] This sentence is to be read as a continuation of the first sentence of the preceding paragraph.

in us, and to grasp what is manifest through what is visible in us.[57] He described Himself as being well-pleased and wrathful, and so existentiated the world as a place of fear and hope, where His wrath is feared and His good-pleasure hoped for. He also described Himself as being the Beautiful and the Possessor of Majesty, and so existentiated us to experience awe and intimacy. Such is the case for everything attributed to Him and for that by which He is named.[58] He spoke of these two Qualities as the two Hands that turned towards the creation of Perfect Man,[59] by reason of his being that which unites all the realities and individuals of the world. The world is visible and the Vicegerent is invisible.[60] That is why the sultan is set under veil.[61]

God describes Himself with reference to veils of darkness, which are the natural bodies, and veils of light,[62] which are the subtle spirits, for the world is made up of the gross and the subtle; it is its own veil over itself. Its perception of itself does not comprehend the Real. It shall ever be within a veil that shall remain unlifted, even with its knowledge that it is distinguished from its Existentiator by reason of its needfulness. Indeed, it has no share in that necessity of the Essence which belongs to the existence of the Real. It will never perceive God, and because of this reality, God remains unknown both to the knowledge through taste and that of witnessing, because what comes to be has no place in this.[63]

God only gathered Adam together between his two Hands as an act of ennoblement. Regarding this He said to Iblis, *What hath prevented thee from*

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[57] *Ghayb* literally means that which is absent, and *shahadah* literally means witnessing or testimony. I have chosen to translate them as invisible and visible when they form this particular pair. This distinction between the realm of the invisible and the realm of the visible is fundamental to Ibn al-'Arabi's metaphysics. These designate two poles rather than strictly definable realms. That is to say, in relation to the immutable identities the world of imagination is part of the visible, while the imaginational world is invisible in relation to the sensorial world. Thus, reality is arrayed according to various levels of being invisible and being visible. The world of sense perception is the world of visibility in an absolute way, and the divine presence is the realm of invisibility in an absolute way, and the degrees in between are combinations of the two extremes. As technical terms they are not confined to visual experience, but comprise all modes of perception.

[58] These sentences allude to the well-known Sufi distinction between the Qualities of Beauty (*jamal*) and the Qualities of Majesty (*jalal*).

[59] Referring to the verse where God speaks to Satan, saying, *What hath prevented thee from prostrating to what I have created with My two Hands?* See below.

[60] The reality of man, it will be recalled, is that by which the world is made. It is thus the spirit of the world, as described in the introduction.

[61] The sultan represents worldly authority and centrality, while Perfect Man represents cosmic authority and centrality as the Vicegerent of God.

[62] A reference to the tradition, "God has seventy"—or seventy thousand—"veils of light and darkness; were they to be removed, the Glories of His Face would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures." See *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 401.

[63] Because the world is essentially that which is other than God, it can have no experience or "taste" (*dhawq*) of God as self-necessary Being. The world knows that it is needful in its existence, and also knows what it is to be itself as a matter of experience or "taste", but this taste could never extend to knowing God. To know something by taste or experience is to possess it as part of oneself, and this is inadmissible when speaking about the relationship of God to the world. Only God can know God.

prostrating to what I have created with my two Hands?[64] This refers to nothing other than His very act of bringing together the two forms: the form of the world and the form of the Real, which are the two Hands of God. Iblis is a part of the world, and does not attain to this synthesis.[65] It was because of this that Adam was Vicegerent. Were he not manifest in the form of He who entrusted him with Vicegerency, within that over which he was made Vicegerent, he would not have been Vicegerent. If he did not contain all that was needed of him by the charge over which he was set as Vicegerent—and by reason of their dependence upon him he would have to possess everything that they needed—he would not be Vicegerent over them. Vicegerency is only for Perfect Man.[66] The makeup of his outward form is made up of the realities of the world and its forms, and his inward form is modeled on the Form of God most high. For this reason He has said of him, "I will be his sight…and his hearing."[67] He did not say, "I will be his eye and his ear," thus differentiating between the two forms.[68] In similar fashion, He is in every existent thing of the world in the measure of what the reality of that existent thing requires of Him, though not one of them possesses the totality of the Vicegerent. He surpasses them only through this totality. Were it not for the Real's pervasion of existent things through the Form,[69] the world would have no existence, and similarly, were it not for those universal intelligible realities, no determination would be manifest in concrete existents. Because of this reality[70] the world's needfulness for God lies in its existence.

So, all are needful, all are not beyond need
This is the truth I have said with no metaphor
If you recall a possessor beyond any needfulness
Then you will know what we mean in our discoursing
All is connected to all, and suffers no severance
. So take from me what I have now recalled to you

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[64] 38:75

[65] It is worth noting here that Qaysari mentions a view which states that Satan is the macrocosmic manifestation of the Divine Name the Misguider (*al-Mudill*), whose microcosmic counterpart is the negative pole of the imagination, i.e. the faculty of conjecture (*al-quwah al-wahmiyyah*) or "the soul which commands to evil" (*al-nafs al-ammarah bi'l-su'*). Man is a manifestation of the Name *Allah*, and thus manifests all the Names.

[66] These sentences elaborate upon man's function as axis and spirit of the cosmos.

[67] Bukhari, 81:38 This Divine Saying reads, "…My slave approaches Me with nothing more dear than what I have enjoined upon him. And My slave ever approaches Me with supererogatory works until I love him. When I love him, I will be his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks…"

[68] Hearing and sight are inward in relationship to the eye and the ear. It is worth remembering, as Ibn al-'Arabi does later, that this Divine Saying then proceeds to mention man's foot and hand.

[69] Referring to the fact that the qualities of the world are none other than the Qualities of God, which is to say that all forms unfold His Form or Image.

[70] Referring to the aforementioned relationship of God to the world.

Now you know the wisdom of the makeup of Adam, by which I mean his manifest form, and you also know the makeup of Adam's spirit, by which I mean his inner form. He is the Real/creation. You also know the makeup of his station, which is the totality by virtue of which he merits Vicegerency. Adam is the *single soul* from which the species of Man was created, for God most high says, *O mankind, be wary of thy Lord who created thee from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from them did propagate men and women in great numbers.*[71] As for His Words, *Be wary of thy Lord*,[72] it means to make what manifests from thee a protection for thy Lord, and make what is hidden of thee—that is, thy Lord—a protection for thee. Indeed, the affair consists of either blame or praise; be His protection in blame, and make Him your protection in praise, that you may be possessors of *adab* and knowledge.[73]

Then God, glorified be and exalted be He, showed Adam what He had placed within him, and this He placed in His two Hands: in the one was the world, and in the other was Adam and all his progeny, and He made clear their levels and ranks therein.[74]

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Since God, glorified and exalted is He, has shown me, in my mystery, what He has placed in this most great Imam and progenitor,[75] I have placed in this book what was set out for me, but not that to which I have attained, for indeed that could not be encompassed in a book nor by the present existent world. What I have witnessed and placed in this book, as determined for me by the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, consists of:

Ringstone of the Divine Wisdom in the Word of Adam, which is the present chapter,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Breathing in the Word of Seth,

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[71] 4:1

[72] Ibn 'Arabi is here bringing out the linguistic relationship between godwariness (*taqwa*) and protection (*waqayah*), both coming from the root w-q-y.

[73] Proper *adab* demands that, from the human perspective, what is good be attributed to God and what is evil to oneself. One 'protects' God in blame by not falsely attributing evil to him, and one makes Him one's own protection in praise by correctly attributing the good to Him. From the divine perspective everything that is called good or evil comes from God. From the first point of view evil is a reality at its own level, while from the second point of view all is good since all comes from God.

[74] *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their bodies, their seed, and made them testify, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify.'* (7:173) On this verse there is the following tradition, "God created Adam and with His Hand touched his body. Progeny issued from him, and He said, 'I have created these for Paradise, and they shall carry out the acts of the Folk of Paradise.' Then He touched his body and progeny issued from him. He said, 'I have created these for the Fire, and they shall carry out the acts of the folk of the Fire.'" (Tirmidhi *Tafsir*) This symbolic narrative describes the state of man in the archetypal world before manifestation.

[75] Referring to Adam.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Glorification in the Word of Noah,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Holiness in the Word of Enoch,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Enchanting Love in the Word of Abraham,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Real in the Word of Isaac,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Loftiness in the Word of Ishmael,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Spirit in the Word of Jacob,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Light in the Word of Joseph,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Unity in the Word of Hud,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Opening in the Word of Salih,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Heart in the Word of Shu'ayb,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Mastery in the Word of Lot,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Ordainment in the Word of Ezra,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Prophethood in the Word of Jesus,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of the All-Merciful in the Word of Solomon,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Existence in the Word of David,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Soul in the Word of Jonah,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Invisible in the Word of Job,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Majesty in the Word of John,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Possessing in the Word of Zachariah,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Intimacy in the Word of Elias,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Excellence in the Word of Luqman,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Imam in the Word of Aaron,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Moses,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Self-Sufficiency in the Word of Khalid,
Ringstone of the Wisdom of Uniqueness in the Word of Muhammad.

The ringstone of each Wisdom is the Word related to it. I have limited myself to the Wisdoms I mention in this book, in accordance with the limits established in the archetype of the Book.[76] I have made myself subject to what was described to me, and have stopped at what was set out to me. If I were to add anything to it, I would not be able; the presence[77] prevents this. And God granteth success, there is no Lord but He.

[76] *Umm al-kitab*, referring to the presence of the immutable identities containing the archetypes of all things.
[77] Evidently referring to the presence of God, meaning that the contents of the book are providential.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Exhalation[78] in the Word of Seth

Know that the gifts and bestowals manifested within being,[79] by slaves and others, come in two types: there are Essence gifts and Name gifts;[80] these are distinct in the sight of the Folk of Taste. Likewise there are those which result from a request regarding something specific, others resulting from a request that is non-specific. In addition, there are those which are not the result of a request, be they Essence or Name gifts. As for what is specific, it is as one who says, "Grant me such-and-such," and specifies something, there being nothing else that occurs to him. As for the non-specific, it is as one who says, "Grant me something which Thou knowest hath benefit for me," without specifying any part, be it subtle or gross,[81] of himself. Those who make requests come in two categories. In the case of a person of the first category, haste prompts the request, for indeed, *Man was created hasty*.[82] As for the person in the other category, he is prompted to the request because he knows that there are things with God which are known to be granted only after a request, and so he says, "Perchance what we ask of Him, glorified be He, will be of this kind." His request vehicles the possibility that is there;[83] he does not know what is contained within the knowledge of God,[84] nor what his preparedness will accord him in terms of his receptivity, because among the most concealed things which can be known is the awareness, at all individual moments, of an individual's preparedness in those

[78] *Nafthiyyah*, which according to the commentators is meant to point out the correspondence between Seth's having come out from Adam and the Divine Breath coming from God. Also, Seth's name, which means gift, corresponds to God's bestowal of existence through breathing. The "Breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas al-Rahman*) is a recurring theme in the *Ringstones*.

[79] *Kawn* usually refers to existentiated or externalized existence (*al-wujud al-khariji*). In this translation being always signifies *kawn* except in the case of God, where "Being" is sometimes used to designate *wujud*. *Takwin* is rendered as "bringing into being" and variants upon this phrase. See *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 41-42 for an explanation of *kawn*.

[80] Some gifts originate from the Essence, which is denoted by *Allah*, Lord (*al-Rabb*), the All-Merciful (*al-Rahman*), etc… while others originate from the particular Names, as Ibn al-'Arabi discusses below.

[81] That is, be it a material or spiritual request.

[82] 21:37

[83] Some gifts have as one of their conditions that a request be made for it, while others are given without such a condition. For Ibn al-'Arabi it is part of the Divine economy that there be realized the possibility of a gift which is only given when it is asked for, just as the possibility of an unsolicited gift is realized in other circumstances. It is in this sense that the request vehicles the possibility. It does not put a constraint upon God, since unsolicited gifts are mentioned here as well. We would restrict God if we said that He only bestows without regard for a request. If we said that it is never the case that God bestowed only after a request we would be denying Him this possibility and would be limiting Him. This point echoes one of the major themes of the *Ringstones*, namely of restricting God through asserting only His absoluteness.

[84] What is contained in the knowledge of God is in fact his very identity. It is according to the preparedness of his identity that he can receive what he receives from God.

moments.[85] If not for what the preparedness accorded the request, he would not have asked.[86] Thus, the goal of the Folk of Presence who do not know in this way[87] is to know it in the moment they are in. Because of their presence they know what the Real will grant them at that moment, and that they will only receive it through their preparedness.[88] They are of two categories: one category knows their preparedness because of what they receive, and one category knows what they will receive because of their preparedness. This most complete knowledge of preparedness is found in this latter category. Those of this category are those who ask neither from haste nor from possibility; they ask only in conformity with the command of God in His Words, *Call upon Me and I shall respond to you*.[89] Such a one is the genuine slave. He has no ambition connected with what he asks for, be it something specific or non-specific; his ambition lies solely in his conformity with the commands of his Master. When the state demands the request, slavehood[90] asks; and when it demands entrustment and silence, it is silent. Job, upon him be peace, and others besides him were afflicted, but did not ask for the lifting of what God most high, had inflicted upon them. Afterwards, at some other time, the state called for them to ask that it be lifted, and so God lifted it from them.[91] The expediting or delaying of something that is requested pertains to the ordainment[92] named for it in the eyes of God. Now, if the request conforms to the moment, He will respond quickly. If the moment is to come later, whether it will be in this lower world or in the Hereafter, the response will come later—and I refer to the thing asked for, not the response from God of *Labbayk*,[93] so understand.

Now for the second group, spoken of in our words, "There are those which are not the result of a request." In the case of that which does not result from a request,

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[85] In a general way such a person, i.e. the one who says, "Perchance what we ask of Him will be of this kind," knows that it is his preparedness that will determine what he receives. He does not, however, know the specifics or the full elaboration (*tafsil*) of his preparedness, and similarly does not know what he will receive.

[86] That is to say, it is in fact one's very preparedness that brings about that specific request at that specific moment. It is part of the Holiest Emanation or the self-disclosure of the invisible, and will determine what the Holy Emanation or the self-disclosure of the visible will be. In this case, his preparedness, which stems from the Holiest Emanation, determines that the Holy Emanation bring into existence his request for a gift from God. This request then serves as a condition for a further emanation of what is contained in his identity.

[87] That is, who do not know their preparedness at all moments.

[88] Instead of knowing their preparedness at all possible moments, they know it in the present moment only.

[89] 40:60

[90] That is, one's quality of being a slave (*'abd*).

[91] *And Job—when he called unto his Lord, 'Behold, affliction has visited me, and Thou art the most merciful of the merciful.' So We answered him, and removed the affliction that was upon him, and We gave his people, and the like of them with them, mercy from Us, and a Reminder to those who serve.* (21:83-84)

[92] See the discussion of *qadar* and *qada'* in the Ringstone of Ezra, p.***.

[93] This response is traditionally the call pilgrims offer when they enter the sacred precincts. It means, "Here I am!" or, "At you service!"

what is meant by request is an articulation; in reality[94] a request must needs be made either through articulation, through a state, or through preparedness. There can never be absolute[95] praise except through articulation. A state necessarily qualifies it spiritually$_m$.[96] What incites you to the praise of God is that in you which qualifies by virtue of a Name of an Act or one of incomparability.[97] The preparedness of the slave

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[94] *Fi nafs al-amr*. This phrase is present throughout the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi. It means "the actual situation" or "things as they are in themselves".

[95] Absolute (*mutlaq*) as unqualified, meaning that *qua* articulation a request is only what it is, regardless of who makes the request or what his inward state is. "Grant me such and such" allows of no real qualification insofar as it is a formation of words.

[96] *Fi'l-ma'na* or *bi'l-ma'ana*, meaning literally "in meaning" or "through meaning", which is a crucial technical term in all of Islamic metaphysics. Generally *ma'na* is set opposite *surah*, or form. Chittick comments, "…[T]he term 'form' normally calls to mind a second reality which the form manifests. X is the form of Y. This second reality is often called the "meaning" (*ma 'na*) of the form." (*Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p.11) Chittick has rendered it as "supersensory meaning" or "suprasensory reality" when it does not simply denote "meaning". As a technical term a meaning is an essence that has no spatio-temporal dimension in itself. It is a *formless* entity in the sense that in itself it is extended neither statically (in space) nor dynamically (in time). A form, when considered in opposition to meaning, is an essence that *does* possess spatio-temporal dimensions. A form is a *formal* essence, and by definition is that which is extended in space and time. For example, mercy is not a sensorial quality, though it manifests in a mother through her behavior towards her child. No part of the mother's physical make-up is mercy, nor are any of her actions themselves mercy; mercy is a *meaning* that is expressed through these formal entities. It is quite correct to think of the meaning as the *spirit* of the form. It is that formless something that is the inward reality of the outward form. In the world of forms these meanings could only appear *in* form. There are no forms that are not forms of some meaning: the two go together like finger and nail. This conception should not be confused with Aristotelian hylomorphism, in which form is an essence that actualizes a potentiality in matter. Form and meaning are both actualities; both the form and meaning of a thing have a real essence or what-it-is, unlike Aristotelian form and matter where matter represents only the potentiality for the existence of a form. To use the simple example of colors, we can say that green has a form, but green also *means* something. It conveys something that is within the object of our sight, but which touches our soul and not our eye. There is a green which we can point to and a green which we cannot. The first is the form (formal essence), the second the meaning (formless essence). The use of 'meaning' is awkward at first but actually quite profound, because it evokes the symbolism of speech which is so important in Sufi writings. When we speak a sentence, that sentence has a form and a meaning. God is ever speaking the universe, and it appears to us as forms and meanings, separate yet inseparable. When a form manifests, God means something by that form, and when God means something He manifests it in form.

The word *ma'na* can also be used to refer to the inward faculties of man as opposed to his outward faculties. One's 'meaning' hearing is the dimension of the Heart that forms the principle of one's sensory hearing. It is one's spiritual hearing. Often when Ibn al-'Arabi speaks of something occurring 'in meaning' he means that it occurs in one's soul as opposed to manifesting outwardly. The meaning is the inward reality out work in the outward, the formless in the form, the hidden in the apparent. I have tries to consistently translate *ma'na* as meaning, but on some occasions it appears as spirit$_m$ or spiritually$_m$, as opposed to spirit without the subscript which translates *ruh*.

Later in the *Ringstones* Ibn al-'Arabi alludes to the distinction between sensory hearing and hearing in the realm of meaning. The latter is the non-corporeal principle of the former. Meaning is always inward in relationship to sense, which is outward. Considered in the first way, a meaning is a thing abstracted from things and exists wholly in the mind, while in the latter case a meaning is a concrete reality that is set in opposition to form. Form and meaning interweave and together comprise the objects of the world and hence the objects of our knowledge.

[97] A state (*hal*) is always a particular state and not another. One's state compels one to praise God, and it is this very state which makes one employ a Name such as the Giver (*al-Razzaq*) or the Bestower

is not perceived by its possessor, but he perceives the state because he knows what has incited him—the state precisely.[98] Now, preparedness is the most hidden of requests. Only their[99] knowledge that God had decreed something for them prevented these people from making a request. They had prepared their loci to receive His answer, having become absent from their own souls and desires. Among them is one[100] who knows that God's knowledge of him, in all of his states, is what he is in his identity's state of immutability prior to its existence, and he knows that the Real grants him nothing but what the knowledge of his identity grants Him, which is what he is in his state of immutability.[101] He knows from whence God's knowledge of him is realized. There is no category of the Folk of God more exalted or more unveiled than this category. They know the mystery of ordainment, and they are of two groups: there are those among them who know it in a general way and there are those among them who know it in detail. The one who knows in detail is more exalted and more perfect than the one who knows in a general way, for he knows what is contained in God's knowledge of him, either through signs of God which pertain to him—which concern the knowledge of him his identity grants Him—or through the unveiling to him of his immutable identity and the infinite transitions of the states it encounters. This latter is more exalted, for indeed, as concerns his knowledge of himself he is at the degree of God's knowledge of him, because what is received comes from a single source.[102] However, from the standpoint of the slave this is Divine solicitude,[103] which has preceded him, and which the companion of this unveiling knows in all the states of his identity when God shows this—that is, the states of his identity—to him.[104] It is not within the scope of the creature, when God has shown him the states of his immutable identity upon which the form of existence has descended, that he should, in this state, attain to the knowledge the Real has of the

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(*al-Wahhab*) which are Names of Acts, or the Holy (*al-Quddus*) and Self-Sufficient (*al-Samad*) which are Names of incomparability (*tanzih*).

[98] This is not the case for all people, as the Shakyh makes clear below.

[99] Evidently referring back to Job and those with him (preceding paragraph).

[100] Among this same group of people. "One" refers to a kind of person, not literally to a single individual.

[101] This sentence introduces Ibn al-'Arabi's central assertion that knowledge (*'ilm*) depends or follows the object of knowledge (*ma'lum*). One's immutable identity is determined by a Divine Name, and this Divine Name is an object of God's knowledge, this presence of the Name in the God' knowledge constituting the very reality of the immutable identity. When a person attains to the level of the immutable identities, he has attained to that very level which is God's knowledge of what he is, which is constituted not only of his particular qualities but also everything that he does and everything that happens to him. All of this is contained in his immutable identity.

[102] In the case of knowing what is ordained for him through signs, what is meant are various kinds of inspirations or indications which give him knowledge of his destiny. In the latter case, an unveiling takes place and he will have direct knowledge of his identity, not a knowledge through signs and allusions.

[103] This might also be translated as Providence.

[104] God's knowledge of the identities is essential to Him. When a person attains to this knowledge it is by virtue of God's having granted him this vision.

immutable identities in their state of non-existence, for they are attributions of the Essence which have no form.[105] Thus we say that the Divine solicitude preceded this slave as regards this equivalence in the attainment of knowledge.[106] For this reason God, most high, says, *Until we know*.[107] These are words whose meaning is certain, and they are not as those who do not drink from this spring imagine them to be. The best one who asserts God's incomparability can do is to assign this coming to be in knowledge to the attachment.[108] This is the loftiest point of view open to the intellect of the theologian. If only he did not assert that knowledge is extrinsic to the Essence, assigning attachment to it and not to the Essence.[109] It is by this that the realized one of the Folk of God, the man of unveiling and existence,[110] is set apart.

And now we return to the gifts and say that gifts are either Essence gifts or Name gifts. Now, as for Essence bestowals, grants, and gifts, they come only from a divine self-disclosure. This self-disclosure of the Essence can only ever take on the form of the preparedness of the object of the self-disclosure; it is never otherwise.[111]

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[105] God's knowledge of an identity, as was mentioned above, is essential, meaning that it is an intrinsic aspect of His Self, while this knowledge belongs to certain people only when God grants it. The creature does not know the identity as God knows it precisely because he comes from the starting point of being a creature to whom this knowledge is unveiled, whereas for God this knowledge is eternal and intrinsic to Himself. The immutable identities *are* forms in God's knowledge, so when they are said to have no form what is meant is that they originate from attributions of the Essence, i.e. Divine Names, which are not forms. When the creature approaches the immutable identities they are always forms from his point of view, forms which he then has the possibility of coming to know. For God, as was explained in the introduction, these identities are not really forms but His own knowledge of Himself. It is in this sense, from the point of view of God, that Ibn al-'Arabi denies form to the identities.

[106] This equivalence (that is, in knowledge of the immutable identity) is the meeting point, as it were, of the ascent of the creature and the descent of the Creator, the former a movement of realization and the second an act of self-disclosure.

[107] *And we shall assuredly try you until We may know those of you who struggle and are steadfast…* (47:31)His argument is that this refers to God's knowledge of the immutable identities of those who struggle and are steadfast.

[108] Those "who do not drink from this source" object to the assertion that knowledge depends upon or follows the known thing because it introduces coming to be (*huduth*) into God's knowledge. The response to this is that insofar as knowledge is something other than the Essence Itself there must be a relationship between knower and known. This relationship is eternal and does not introduce any temporality or coming to be. God knows eternally, and one cannot say that God knows without saying that he knows something. For Ibn al-'Arabi the best possible position open to the theologian (*al-mutakallim*) is to say that God's Knowledge is eternal, but its attachment to things which come to be itself comes to be. See next note.

[109] That is, assigning the attachment to knowledge and not the Essence. The difference of opinion hinges on the fact that the theologian denies that God's knowledge is identical with His Essence. The "man of realization" (*muhaqqiq*) asserts that God's knowledge is identical with Him from one point of view and is not identical from another.

[110] Qaysari notes that *wujud* here really means *wijdan* or consciousness. It is worth noting here that the ternary derived from the root w-j-d of *wujud* (existence or being), *wijdan* (consciousness or awareness), and *wajd* (ecstasy or bliss) corresponds exactly to the Hindu ternary of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. This was first pointed out to me some years ago by S.H. Nasr.

[111] As mentioned in the introduction, *tajalli* is the disclosure of the Divine Self. All other selves are disclosures of the one Self. When Ibn al-'Arabi says that the self-disclosure can only take on the form of the preparedness of the slave, he means that the self-disclosure of witnessing takes on the form of the self-disclosure of the invisible. The identity is the object of self-disclosure (*al-mutajalli lahu*), and

Thereafter the object of self-disclosure sees nothing but his own form in the mirror of the Real, and it is not possible that he should see Him, although he knows that it is only in Him that he sees his own form. It is similar to what one finds in a visible mirror: when you see a form in it you do not see *it*,[112] although you know that only there do you see forms—or your own form. Now, God has manifested this as a similitude, employing it to represent the self-disclosure of the Essence, so that the object of self-disclosure will know that he does not see Him.[113] There is no symbol which comes closer to or more closely resembles this vision and this self-disclosure. When you see a form in a mirror, struggle within yourself to see the body of the mirror; you will, without any doubt, never see it.[114] Some of those who have grasped the likes of this—concerning forms in mirrors—have held the position that the visible form is to be found between the sight of the onlooker and the mirror. This is the most sublime knowledge ordained for them, but this matter is as we have spoken of it and have held it to be. We have explained this in *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*. If you have tasted this, you have tasted of the goal which, for the creature, no goal exceeds. Do not entertain any hopes and do not tire your soul in trying to ascend to something higher than this degree; there is no such thing at all, and there is nothing after it but pure non-existence.[115] He is your mirror for your vision of yourself, and you are His mirror for His vision of His Names—which are none other than Himself—and the manifestation of their determinations.[116]

And so the matter becomes confused and ambiguous. Among us are those in whose knowledge there remains ignorance, who say that the inability to achieve

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its very nature as a receptacle for the emanation of external existence (*al-wujud al-khariji*) is its preparedness. When God gives with respect to His Self, it will be none other than the unfolding of something which is already contained in the essence or identity of the individual to whom He gives.

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[113] Which could also be read as, "…so that the object of self-disclosure will know that it is himself that he sees."

[114] It is not within the scope of the creature to see God, because God is unqualified and the identity is qualified in being one identity and not another. We know that our existence subsists through God, just as we know that the image we see "subsists" through the mirror. This knowledge does not, however, equal our vision of God or vision of the material of the mirror while we are witnessing ourselves in God or our image in a mirror. We see God in the measure in which we see ourselves, because our identities are forms of the Divine Names and Qualities.

[115] Our visions and experiences are not things outside of our immutable identity. No matter how high we go, all that we ever find is more and more of ourselves. There is nothing beyond our own identity to which we can attain, because beyond it there is only the Divine Self. The Divine Self, which is by definition pure Subject, could never be the object of any type of knowledge. Only the Self truly knows the Self. When that which is not the Self knows the Self, it is really knowing only a certain aspect of the Self, this aspect being the reality of its own identity which is a disclosure of the Self. In the face of the Self all other selves are nothing. This is what is meant in saying that after this point there is only pure non-existence.

[116] Through His self-disclosure God provides the very reality which makes it possible for a being to know itself. On the other hand, it is the existence of the identities and of external creation that actualizes the relationship of God to the world, of Creator-creature and similar relationships. Without the world there would be no relationship at all and the Divine Names would have nothing to determine.

perception is a perception.[117] But there are those among us who do know and so do not speak so, which is a more exalted thing to say. Indeed, knowledge bestows silence upon them, not inability. They are the most exalted of those who know God. This knowledge belongs to none but the Seal of the Messengers and the Seal of the Saints. No Prophet and Messenger can see Him unless it be from the niche of the Messenger-Seal, and no saint can see Him unless it be from the niche of the Saint-Seal. Moreover, when the Messengers see Him, they see Him from the niche of the Seal of the Saints. Now, the functions of messenger and prophet—and I refer to the prophethood of a law and its message—both come to an end, but sainthood never ends.[118] The Messengers, due to their being saints, only see what we have spoken of from the niche of the Seal of the Saints—so what of the other saints? Even though the Seal of the Saints follows the prescriptions of the Law brought by the Seal of the Messengers, this does not impinge upon his station, nor does it contradict the position we hold; he is lesser from one point of view, just as he is more exalted from another. The position we hold is reinforced by what has appeared in the outward aspect of our Law—in Umar's superiority as regards the decision made concerning the prisoners of Badr, as well as in the incident of the pollination of the palms.[119] It is not necessary that a perfect man have precedence in all things and at all levels. The Men only pay heed to that precedence which concerns one's level in knowing God; that is their final goal. Their minds are not attached to beings that come to be, and so they realize what we have spoken of.[120]

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[117] This is in reference to a saying attributed to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, "Glory be to He who has given creation no path to knowing Him other than the inability of knowing Him." Quoted from *Kitab al-luma'* of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj, ed. R. A. Nicholson, 1914, p. 36 of the Arabic text (cited in Austin). Perception (*idrak*) in the context of Islamic metaphysics encompasses levels beyond the sensorial. There is imaginational as well as intellectual *idrak*. It might also be translated as consciousness.

[118] See Ringstone of Ezra for a discussion of the continuation of sainthood and the ending of prophethood.

[119] This refers to two incidents in the life of the Prophet. The first involved the decision over what to do with the prisoners taken at Badr, while the second refers to some advice the Prophet gave on the pollination of palms. After the battle the Prophet made a decision about the prisoners which was later overturned by a revelation, while in the case of the palms he gave some advice which later turned out to be incorrect. To this he said, "You know better the affairs of this, your lower-world."

[120] This paragraph introduces Ibn al-'Arabi's controversial discussion of the relationship between sainthood (*walayah*) and prophethood (*nubuwwah*), which also includes the elusive question as to the true identity of the Seal of the Saints. The most comprehensive treatment of this topic is given in Chodkiewicz's *Seal of the Saints*, which the reader is encouraged to consult. In this and in the final paragraphs of this chapter the following questions need to be answered: Who is the Seal of the Saints? Who is the Seal of the Messengers? What is the relationship of the Seal of the Saints to the Seal of the Messengers? What is the relationship of the Seal of the Saints to other saints, and that of the Seal of the Messengers to the other messengers and prophets? What does it mean to be a Seal (*khatm*)? What is the relationship of sainthood to prophethood?

Sainthood is superior to prophethood, while the prophets are superior to the saints. The contradiction is only apparent, because each prophet is a "special kind of saint" as Ibn al-'Arabi points out in the Ringstone of Ezra. Thus the Prophet is superior to all the saints, who are his heirs. Within his person his sainthood is superior to his prophethood, but by virtue of his perfect sainthood and his prophethood together he surpasses all other saints.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, likened prophethood to a wall of bricks, complete but for the space of a brick. He was, may God bless him and grant him peace, that brick, except that he does not see it—as he had said—as being a single brick.[121] As for the Seal of the Saints, it must be that he is possessed of this vision, seeing what the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, described in similitude, seeing in the wall the space of two bricks, a brick of gold and one of silver. And so he sees the two bricks in whose absence the wall is unfinished, and by which the wall shall become complete, a brick of gold and a brick of silver. It must be that he sees himself being set in the place of these two bricks, the Seal of the Saints thus being these two bricks; and thus the wall becomes complete. As for the reason that necessitates his seeing two bricks, it is that he follows outwardly the law of the Seal of the Messengers. This is the place of the silver brick, that is, his manifest aspect and the rulings that he follows, but he receives from God the secret of what he follows in outward form, for he sees the reality *as it is*, and it must be that he sees it this way, while being inwardly the place of the golden brick. He receives from

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The identity of the Seal of the Prophets is not open to debate. It is the Prophet Muhammad himself. With him prophethood and divine legislation end, but sainthood continues until the end of time. In speaking of the Seal of the Saints, it must be noted that the Shaykh mentions two Seals, not only one, in the *Futuhat*. The first is the Seal of Universal Sainthood, who is explicitly identified with Jesus, and the other is the Seal of Muhammadan sainthood, which Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes identifies with himself while at other times he seems to assign this office to another person whom he has met. A crucial passage which Chodkiewicz quotes from the Futuhat reads:

As God has sealed legislative prophethood through Muhammad, through the Muhammadan Seal he has sealed the sainthood which comes from the Muhammadan heritage, not the sainthood which comes from the heritage of other prophets: among the saints, in fact, some, for example, inherit from Abraham, some from Moses, some from Jesus, and after this Muhammadan Seal there will be others; whereas no other saint will ever be 'on the heart' of Muhammad.

The Seal of Universal Sainthood, after which there will be no other saint [who will reach that level], is Jesus, and we have met a number of saints who were 'on the heart' (*'ala qalb*) of Jesus or another of the Messengers… (*Seal of the Saints*, p. 118)

This passage and Chodkiewicz's detailed and comprehensive discussion allow us to make several conclusions. First, Ibn al-'Arabi did identify himself as the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, while the Seal of Universal Sainthood is Jesus. As the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, he does not seal or end sainthood as such but only a specific kind of sainthood, while the other kinds of sainthood corresponding to the other prophets will remain until the end of time when Jesus will seal them all. Second, when Ibn al-'Arabi says that the Seal of the Saints is superior to the Seal of the Prophets, this refers "not to his dependence with regard to another being but the subordination within himself of the visible aspect to the hidden aspect, of the *nubuwwah*, which is an attribute of created being and comes to an end, to the *walayah*, which is a divine attribute and exists in eternity" (*Seal of the Saints*, p. 125). This is so because, as Ibn al-'Arabi states himself later in the chapter, the Seal of the Saints "is one amongst the perfections of the Seal of the Messengers." "[T]he Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, as a specific individual in history, is no more than a deputy, the support of the sensible manifestation of the *khatmiyyah* or office of the Seal, which belongs always and forever to the Muhammadan Reality alone." (p. 125) This Muhammadan Reality is the source of all sainthood.

[121] This refers to a tradition which reads, "My place among the prophets is as when a man builds a wall and completes it except for one brick. I am that brick, and after me there is neither Messenger nor Prophet." (Bukhari, *manaqib* 18, quoted in *Seal of the Saints* p. 128)

the same source from which the angel received and from which he bestowed revelation unto the Messenger. If you understand what I have alluded to, then you have attained knowledge that avails in all things. Every Prophet, from Adam until the last Prophet, receives[122] only from the niche of the Seal of the Prophets, even though his clay's existence may come later in time. In his reality he is existent, which is spoken of in his words, may God bless him and grant him peace, "I was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay."[123] The other prophets were only prophets when they were sent. Likewise, the Seal of the Saints was a saint while Adam was between water and clay, but the other saints were saints only after attaining the conditions for sainthood, namely the assimilation of the divine virtues. This is so because God is named *the Friend, the Most Praiseworthy*.[124] The Seal of the Messengers, with respect to his sainthood, has the same relationship with the Seal of the Saints that the prophets and messengers have with him; he is Saint-Messenger-Prophet. The Seal of the Saints is the Saint-Heir, who receives from the Principle, and who witnesses the hierarchy.[125] This is one amongst the perfections of the Seal of the Messengers, Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, foremost of them all, lord of Adam's progeny in opening the door of intercession. He is allotted this unique state, which is shared by no other. In this unique state he has precedence over the Divine Names, since the All-Merciful can plead intercession with the Avenger on behalf of the people of affliction only after the intercession of the intercessors.[126] Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, obtains this through mastery over this special station. One who understands the hierarchy and stations will not find it difficult to accept words such as these.

As for the Name bestowals: Know that the bestowals of God most high to His creatures, are a mercy for them from Him, and all of them come from the Names.[127] It can be an unadulterated Mercy, such as the goodness of a pleasurable bounty in this lower world which is free from taint on the Day of Resurrection, which is granted by the Name the All-Merciful and is thus the All-Merciful's gift. Or it can be a mixed mercy, such as drinking an unpleasant medicine whose drinking is followed by ease.

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[122] That is, receives prophethood.

[123] Bukhari, LXI:80

[124] Qur'an, 42:28 He is alluding here to the fact that both God and the saint are referred to as *wali* (friend, ally, protector). To be a saint is to take on the Qualities of God (*al-ittisaf bi sifati'Llah*), a concept that is common throughout Sufism.

[125] This should be read with reference to the passage and notes above.

[126] In this regard Qaysari quotes from the tradition that states that the Prophet is "the first to open the gate of intercession (*shafa'ah*). He will intercede for creation, followed by the prophets, then the saints, then the believers, and the last to intercede will be the Most Merciful of the Merciful (*Arham al-Rahimin*). This last is of course a reference to God as the All-Merciful (*al-Rahman*).

[127] A continuation of the discussion begun by the Essence gifts above. Here gifts are viewed from the point of view of coming from outside of the their recipient. Below Ibn al-'Arabi fuses these two perspectives, saying, "As for any man of unveiling who witnesses a form that gives him knowledge he had not hitherto possessed and bestows him a thing he had not previously held in his grasp, this form is his identity and naught else."

And it is a divine gift. Now, carrying out the giving of a divine gift is only possible through one of the Custodians among the Names. Sometimes God bestows upon the slave through the All-Merciful, and thus the gift is free of any blemish that may be disagreeable to one's nature at the time, or which fails to grant one's wish, and so forth. At other times, God bestows through the Encompassing, where it[128] becomes wider in scope; or through the Wise, thus looking to what is most appropriate at that moment; or through the Giver, bestowing to bring benefit without this Giver burdening the recipient with any responsibility to provide recompense in the form of gratitude or works; or through the Almighty, thus seeing a place and what it is entitled to; or through the Forgiver, seeing a place and its condition. If it is in a state deserving of chastisement, it veils it from that. If it is in a state not deserving of chastisement, then it veils it from a state that would, and thus it is referred to as 'protected', 'cared for', 'guarded', and the like. God bestows gifts by virtue of being the Keeper of what He holds in His coffers. He does not bring it out except *by a known measure*[129]and through a Name specific to that matter. *He granteth everything its creation*[130] through the Just and its Brethren.[131]

The Names of God are infinite because they are known by what comes from them, and what comes from them is infinite, although they stem from a finite number of principles, these being the Mothers of the Names, or the Presences of the Names.[132] In truth there is naught but a single reality that receives all of these attributions and relations we refer to as Divine Names. This reality grants that each of the Names, which manifest infinitely, should possess a reality by which it is distinguished from some other Name. This reality by which it is distinguished is the Name itself, not what is common, just as various gifts are distinguished from one another by their individuality, even though they come from a single source.[133] It is known that one is not the same as another, and the reason for this is the distinction between the Names. In the Divine Presence nothing is repeated at all, due to its scope.[134] This is the well-established truth.

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[128] That is, the gift.

[129] *Naught is there, but its treasuries are with Us, and We send it not down except by a known measure*. (15:15)

[130] 20:50

[131] The imagery of 'brothers' or 'sisters' is common in Arabic. This is simply a reference to the other Names.

[132] By Mothers of the Names Ibn al-'Arabi means a finite group which symbolizes the totality. These "Mothers" can refer to the ninety-nine Names of God, or to the seven Qualities of Life, Knowledge, Will, Power, Hearing, Seeing, and Speech, or to *Allah*, All-Merciful (*al-Rahman*), and Lord (*al-Rabb*), and similar groupings. See *Sufi Path of Knowledge* p. 387 n. 16.

[133] What is common to the Names is that that they all name the One Self, while each Name differs from all the others precisely through what it is. It is only the what-it-is of the Name that makes it different from the others.

[134] This expresses one of the cardinal doctrines of Ibn al-'Arabi, namely that there is never any repetition in self-disclosure (*la takrar fi'l-tajalli*). See *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp 18-19, *Self-disclosure of God* p. 31. This doctrine is closely related to Ibn al-'Arabi's interpretation of the verse

This knowledge was that of Seth, upon whom be peace, and it is his spirit that grants support to any spirit who speaks concerning the likes of this, though this is not so for the spirit of the Seal, for his support comes to him from God and not from any spirit.[135] Nay, it is from his spirit that support is given to all spirits, although he may not be aware of this at the time his elemental corporeal body is brought together. He knows all of this by virtue of his reality and his rank is himself he who is ignorant of it in his aspect of being compounded of elements. He is the knowing-ignorant; he allows of possessing opposing qualities.[136] Recall that the Principle allows of possessing such qualities, such the Majestic and the Beautiful, the Hidden and the Manifest, the First and the Last. These are none other than Himself. Thus he knows and knows not, perceives and perceives not, witnesses and witnesses not.[137] This knowledge was named after Seth, whose meaning is "gift of God". In his hand is the key of gifts, in all their kinds and relations. God bestowed him upon Adam, being the first gift He gave him. He only gave him to him from him, for the child is the mystery of his father. He comes out from him and returns to him.[138]

This will not seem strange to one who bases his intelligence on God. Every bestowal of a gift in being takes place this way. No one contains anything that comes from God, and no one contains anything but his own soul, even though the forms he encounters are diverse. Not every one knows this, that this is the reality of things;

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kullu yawmin huwa fi sha'nin (55:29) which Chittick translates as *Each day He is upon some task*, which can also be rendered, following Arberry as *Every day He is upon some labour*. Chittick translates an excerpt from *K. al-'Abadilah*, "The 'tasks' of the Real are the diverse, contrary, and similar states that belong to the cosmos." *Self-disclosure of God* p. 67

[135] The wisdom associated with Seth is that of gift-giving, as Ibn al-'Arabi mentions below. Thus, anyone who speaks about the giving of gifts as the result of a special kind of spiritual realization does so through the intermediation of the spirit of Seth, which is to say that in doing so such a person becomes heir to the "Sethian" heritage. In keeping with what the Shaykh said about the niche of the Seal in relation to the knowledge possessed by the other saints (as well as prophets), it must be that his spirit itself receive its spiritual support from the Seal, "whose support comes from God."

[136] The body and its accidents functions as a veil over spiritual knowledge. The function of asceticism in spiritual practice is precisely to transcend the body which veils the inner eye from seeing spiritual realities. The commentators note that the Prophet himself was subject to a certain variation in his states, the highest of which is spoken of in the tradition, "I have a moment when neither angels brought near nor prophets sent can encompass me." (This tradition is common in Sufi writings but is not found in the standard books of *hadith*) The lowest part of these cycles is represented by the incident of the pollination of the palms, where the Prophet says, "You know better the affairs of this, your lower-world," although all knowledge, including knowledge of such matters, stems from his own inner reality.

[137] The aspect of ignorance is actually part of the total perfection of an identity. Ignorance takes place because of the veil of the body and the errors of the imagination, but without these modes of existence some of the perfections of the immutable identities would remain unmanifest. It is precisely through ignorance that certain degrees of knowledge are realized, and which would not have been realized without the body and the modes of limitation which it entails.

[138] That is, God gave Seth to Adam through Adam himself. The child is the mystery of his father in the sense that his existence lies within him in a state of potency, and also that the child is part of the father's destiny (see next note). Metaphysically, Qashani explains, Adam represents the primordial totality, the Great Spirit (*ar-ruh al-a'zam*) from which the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kulliyyah*) is begotten, and wherein the gifts of the Great Spirit are manifest.

only certain individuals amongst the Folk of God do. If you see one who does know it, place your trust in him, for this is that very purest part of the quintessence belonging to the elect of the elect among the masses of the Folk of God most high. In the case of any man of unveiling who witnesses a form that gives him knowledge he had not hitherto possessed and bestows him a thing he had not previously held in his grasp, this form is his identity and naught else. From the tree of his soul he harvests the fruit of his knowledge.[139] For example, his outer form, which he meets with in a polished body, is none other than himself, except that the place or the presence within which he sees the form of his soul presented to him will cause some aspect to change. Thus, something large appears small in a small mirror, or long in a long one, in motion in a moving one. It can be that, coming from a specific presence, it shows him an inversion of his own form, or it can be that it shows him that very thing he manifests of it,[140] where its right side faces the right side of the onlooker. It can also be that the right faces the left. This is what predominates in mirrors, being like the ordinary and usual. However, through a departure from the ordinary[141] the right can face the right and manifest reflection. All this comes from the gifts belonging to the reality of the presence which is disclosed therein,[142] and which we have likened to a mirror.[143] Whosoever knows his preparedness knows what he will receive. Not

[139] More so than what he normally may think is himself, all that man witnesses and experiences is in reality an expression of his own immutable identity, which is his own truest self. Thus any gift we receive is an existentiation of an aspect of ourselves.

[140] That is, his form.

[141] This ordinary and usual state of affairs (*al-'ada*) from the previous sentence is contrasted in this sentence with the departure from the ordinary, or *kharq al-'ada*, which might also be rendered as "miraculous occurrence". Chittick explains that, "From one point of view, God's signs can be divided into two basic sorts—those that appear constantly such that we do not notice them, and those that impinge upon our awareness because they break with our concept of normalcy…They include certain natural events and what are commonly called 'miracles' or, in Arabic, 'the breaking of habit' (*kharq al-'ada*)." *Self-disclosure of God*, p. 6.

[142] That is, the reality is disclosed in the presence

[143] In this passage, the various kinds of mirrors represent the various kinds of presences wherein a given reality can be manifest. Thus if a person has a vision in the realm of the imagination, he must understand that the presence where he sees it will determine it in a certain way, and will thus be able to discern what the original reality was from his knowledge of the nature of that specific presence. Ibn al-'Arabi speaks about this in the Ringstone of Jesus (p.***) when he says that each level of reality "colors" whatever is manifest in it. Because anything that a person encounters is really none other than an unfolding of his own reality or destiny, his visions or experiences in the various levels of the world of imagination and the world of spirits are none other than his own identity. Now, even though they are none other than himself they are colored or determined by the nature of the presence in which they are found. It the awareness of the specific nature of the levels of reality which forms the basis for the science of the interpretation of dreams and visions and also plays a part in the esoteric commentary upon divine revelation. This topic will be treated much more extensively by Ibn al-'Arabi in the Ringstones of Isaac and Joseph.

In saying that the right can face the right, what is meant is the vision of a form in the spiritual world, while the right facing the left is a reference to the world of the imagination. The comparison is only allusive since at the level of the spirit there is no question of the dimensions and magnitudes that go into forming an image. The passage is meant to express the fact that the presence of the imagination causes a reality to manifest in a changed form. When the right faces the right and

everyone who knows what he receives knows his preparedness; some only know it after its reception, and if so they only know it in a general way.[144]

Some thinkers, men of feeble intellects, after it having been well established for them that God does as He wills, go on to sanction that things be imputed unto God which contradict wisdom and reality *as it is*.[145] For this reason some thinkers have deviated so far as to deny contingency, while affirming self-necessity and necessity through another. The man of realization affirms contingency and knows its presence, as well as what a contingent thing is, from whence it comes as a contingent thing—it is itself necessary through another—and from whence it becomes proper to use the name of that 'other' which itself necessarily possesses necessity.[146] Only those who know through God will understand this explanation, and they alone.

The last child to be born in this species of Man will be in the line of Seth. He will bear his secrets, and after him there shall be none born of this species; he is the Seal of the Progeny. With him there will be born a sister who shall come out before him, and he shall come out after her such that his head shall be adjacent to her feet. His birth shall be in China, and his language will be that of his land. Sterility will spread amongst men and women. There will be much marriage but no birth. He will call them to God, but will receive no reply. When God most high takes him and takes the believers of his time, those who remain shall do so as beasts, failing to consider lawful things as lawful and forbidden things as forbidden. They shall behave as commanded by their passional nature, bereft of intellect and rule of law, and thus shall the Hour overtake them.[147]

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Glorification in the Word of Noah

Know, may God strengthen thee with a spirit that cometh from Him, that in the sight of the Folk of the Realities to assert incomparability as regards the Divine is to

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reflection occurs, what is meant according to Qashani is that the perfected person who has perished (*fana'*) in God sees God in all things and all things in God through the mirror of his own identity.

[144] Referring to the discussion above on the subject of preparedness.

[145] *Ma huwa al-amr 'alayhi fi nafsi*. The use of *ma huwa 'alayhi* is also quite common in the Shaykh's writings, and I have chosen to render it as "*as it is*", which generally is a reference to the true state of a thing. This sentence is a criticism of the voluntarism of the theologians such as the Ash'arites who emphasized the Will of God over all other things.

[146] The division into contingent, impossible, and necessary is intellectual and has no bearing on what happens in the external world. The impulse of the theologians was to affirm that God was capable of absolutely anything. In their view to say that God is not capable of doing something is tantamount to attributing some sort of deficiency to Him. For Ibn al-'Arabi, this is a confusion of the realm of concepts and the realm of concrete things. To say that it is impossible for God to be unjust is not a limitation, and neither is it a limitation to say that God cannot make 2 and 2 equal 5. Contingency, impossibility, and necessity are ways of thinking about that which actually is and that which actually is not.

[147] According to Chodkiewicz the words, "…in the line of Seth. He will bear his secrets…" indicates that this person will be a *wali* of the Sethian type. His life will fall within the period of the final reign of Jesus, who, as noted above, is the Seal of Universal Sainthood. *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 125-127.

assert delimitation and qualification.[148] The one who asserts incomparability is either ignorant or is a man of poor *adab*. When he utters this and speaks it, speaking through the word of law as a believer and asserting incomparability, stopping there and seeing nothing other than this, he displays bad *adab* and gives the lie to the Real and to the Messengers, God's blessings be upon them, doing so unawares. He imagines that he has realized something, when in actuality it has passed him by. He is like those who believe in some and disbelieve in some,[149] especially since it is known that when the tongues of the Divine Laws utter what they utter concerning the Real most high, they speak of it to the generality of people on the basis of its primary understanding, and to the elite on the basis of everything that is to be understood from the meanings of the words, whatever be the language, employing the norms of that language.[150] The Real has a special manifestation in every created thing.[151] He is the Manifest in every object of understanding, and is the Hidden from all understanding, though He is not hidden from the understanding of one who holds that the world is His Image and His Selfhood. This is the Name the Manifest, just as He is, in meaning, the Spirit of what is manifest, and thus is the Hidden. His relationship to the manifest forms of the world is that of governing spirit to form. In the definition of

[148] *Tanzih* is the assertion of God's incomparability with the world, while *tashbih* is the assertion of His being similar to it. I follow Chittick's translations of "incomparability" and "similarity". He writes, "If we examine anything in the universe, God is Independent of that thing and infinitely exalted beyond it. He is, to employ the theological term that plays a major role in Ibn al-'Arabi's vocabulary, 'incomparable' (*tanzih*) with each thing and all things. But at the same time, each thing displays one or more of God's attributes, and in this respect the thing must be said to be 'similar' (*tashbih*) in some way to God. The very least we can say is that it exists and God exists, though the modalities of existence may be largely incomparable." (*Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p.9, see also *SDG* pp. xxi-xxii.) *Tanzih* and *tashbih* correspond to "transcendence" and "immanence" but are not equivalent to them. What is primarily at stake in the arguments over *tanzih* and *tashbih* is the likeness or un-likeness of God to the world and creatures, and the assertion of it from the point of view of the human subject. Like the term *tawhid*, which means "making one" or "integration" as opposed to simply the idea of unity, *tanzih* and *tashbih* express the act of a knowing subject in relation to God. The idea of transcendence is the logical result of the assertion of God's incomparability with things, just as the idea of immanence is the logical result of the assertion of His similarity or resemblance to them. Our assertion of incomparability or similarity results from the fact of God's transcendence or immanence, depending on the point of view adopted.

[149] A reference to the Qur'an 4:150 *Those who disbelieve…and say, 'We believe in part and disbelieve in part.'*

[150] According to Ibn al-'Arabi, because the revelation is addressed to all people, it must convey a meaningful message to the spiritual elite as well as to the generality of believers. It accomplishes this by employing a language that allows the plain sense to retain all of its validity while concealing meanings that can only be unveiled by those possessing a certain spiritual and intellectual station. Because the Quran is not the only revelation, and Ibn al-'Arabi mentions other languages as receptacles for revelation. In this regard Qaysari mentions the oft-quoted tradition, "The Quran has a surface (*zahr*), a depth (*batn*), a limit (*hadd*), and a point of ascension (*matla'*)." Other similar traditions mention that the Quran has several levels of inward meaning. A very clear exposition of this point of view is given in Mulla Sadra's *Mafatih al-ghayb* (Beirut, 1999) where the contending positions on the esoteric commentary upon the Quran and the Prophet's sayings are discussed.

man, for example, both his manifest and hidden aspects are taken into consideration; such is the case with all objects of definition. Now, the Real is the object of every definition. The forms of the world cannot be well-determined nor can they be encompassed. The definition of any one of these forms is known only in the measure of what is realized, by each knower, of its[152] forms. For this reason, the definition of the Real remains unknown, for His definition could only be known by knowing the definition of every form. To do so is impossible, and so it is impossible to define the Real.[153]

Likewise, one who asserts His similarity but does not assert His incomparability qualifies Him and limits Him; he knows Him not. Whosoever, in knowing Him, brings together the assertion of incomparability and that of similarity, employing these two descriptions in a general way—which would be impossible in detail, for one lacks a comprehensive grasp of the forms of the world—knows Him in a general manner, not in detail, just as one knows oneself in a general manner, not in detail.[154] It was for this reason that the Prophet established a link between the knowledge one has of God and the knowledge one has of oneself, saying, "Whosoever knoweth himself knoweth His Lord."[155] And God most high says, *We shall show them Our signs on the horizons*, which is what lies outside of you, *and in their own souls*, which is your identity, *until it be made clear unto them*, that is, to the onlooker, *that it is the Truth*,[156] that is, by virtue of you being His image, and of His being your spirit. You are to Him as your corporeal form is to you, and He is to you as the governing spirit is to the form of your body.[157] The definition comprises both your manifest and hidden

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[151] This is another way of saying that God discloses Himself in accordance with the preparedness of each individual thing. Because each identity is different from all others, the manifestation of God in each will be unique.

[152] That is, the world's.

[153] All things are loci of manifestation for God, and thus God is defined in every act of definition. Man is commonly defined as a rational animal, "rational" referring to his inward or "hidden" aspect and "animal" to his outward or "manifest" aspect. In the world, it is obvious that the definition of forms can only be known in the measure of our knowledge of things in the world. Such knowledge could never comprise all things, owing to the limitations of the human knower. To fully define or know God, we would have to know all of His loci of manifestation. We need only acknowledge that we can never have complete knowledge of the world in order to assert that we cannot completely know or "define" God, since the world makes up the manifest or outward aspect that is necessary for a complete definition.

[154] It is impossible for anyone to have a detailed and complete knowledge of all the modes of reality; this is something that is only possible for God. An individual is not even able to have this kind of comprehensive knowledge of himself, regardless of whether we are considering the body or the soul.

[155] This is a tradition that is not found in the major collections, although frequently cited especially in Sufi sources. Man comprises all levels of reality, and being a total manifestation of God man knows God in the measure that he knows himself.

[156] Qur'an 40:53

[157] Man is a locus of manifestation for God, as is the world. In the Quranic verse cited above the Truth (*al-Haqq*) could also be rendered as the Real. That is to say, God will show man his signs until he realizes that both the world and himself are none other than loci of manifestation for the Divine Reality.

aspects. The form that remains when its governing spirit leaves it does not do so as a man, although of it one says, "This is the form of a man," there being no difference between it and a form made of wood or of stone. It is given the appellation "man" only metaphorically, not in a true way. The Real can never leave the forms of the world. The definition of His divinity is real and not metaphorical. The same is true for the definition of man while he is alive.[158] Just as the manifest form of man praises its spirit and its governing soul with its tongue, so too did God make the forms of the world to glorify with His praises, although we do not understand their glorification, since we do not wholly grasp the forms of the world.[159] They are all tongues of the Real, and so speak the praises of the Real. For this reason God says, *Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds*.[160] That is, the culmination of all praise stems from Him.[161] He thus gives praise, and is praised:

If thou dost set beyond compare then thou dost qualify
And if thou speak of being same, thou dost delimit
And if thou sayest both, then thou dost guide aright
A master and imam[162] *in realms of knowledge*
To hold to what is even is idolatry
Whoever holds to what is odd does speak of One[163]
Beware of speaking sameness if thou speakest of a second
And beware to set beyond compare, if thou dost speak of One[164]
Thou art not He, yea, thou art He, and Him thou seest

[158] Here divinity (*uluhiyyah*) signifies that there is a divinity (*ilah*) and that for which it is a divinity (*ma'luh*), just as the Lord (*al-Rabb*) requires that there be something of which He is Lord (*marbub*). As the Spirit of the forms of the world, which could not exist in the absence of this spirit, God is by definition the divinity of these objects of divinity. After the soul has left the body, one can refer to the corpse as a man, but were the Divine Spirit to leave the forms of the world they could not exist in any way whatsoever. This is why Ibn al-'Arabi draws an analogy to the body of man only when he is alive.

[159] This is a reference to the many verses in the Quran that speak of all things in the heavens and the earth praising God. Part of our limitation in knowing the forms of the world is the fact that we are not able to understand the glorification of all things, from animals to minerals.

[160] 1:2

[161] That is to say, although the final end of all praise is God, in reality the origin of this praise is God Himself, since all things are "tongues of the Real" or are His self-disclosures.

[162] *Imam* can allow of several levels of meaning. It can refer simply to the person who leads any group of people in Prayer, or to the established prayer leader of a mosque, or to a scholar of very high stature. In Sunni Islam only a very small number of scholars have the title Imam, such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. Of course, in Shi'i Islam the Imams are the highest authority, both spiritually and temporally, after the Prophet.

[163] By even what is meant is duality, and by what is odd (*fard*, which also means individual) what is meant is oneness.

[164] Ibn al-'Arabi does not mean to assert that any kind of dualism is idolatry or polytheism properly speaking. If one does speak of the world or that which is "other than God", then one must be on guard as to asserting God's similarity with the world. On the other hand, there is a danger of overemphasizing transcendence in holding too strongly to the idea of oneness.

In all things' quintessence, both as boundless and qualified[165]

God most high says, *Naught is there like unto His likeness,* asserting incomparability, and, *He is the Hearing, the Seeing*,[166] asserting similarity. God says, *Naught is there like unto His likeness*, asserting similarity and duality. *And He is the Hearing, the Seeing*, asserting incomparability and oneness.

If Noah, peace be upon him, had brought these two calls together for his people, they would have responded to him.[167] He called them openly, then called them secretly, then said unto them, *Ask you forgiveness from your Lord. Surely He is Ever-Forgiving*,[168] and he said, *I have called my people by night and by day, but my calling has only increased them in flight*.[169] Of his people he mentions that they turned a deaf ear to his call. This was because they knew what was incumbent upon them regarding the response to this call. Those who know God know what Noah was alluding to concerning his people, in his praising them through the language of blame.[170] They also know that they did not respond to his call because of the *Furqan*

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[165] That is to say, one will acknowledge the absolute and the qualified, the former referring to the Divine Essence and the latter to Its manifestations.

[166] Qur'an 42:11 This verse has two equally valid but slightly different readings, both of which Ibn 'Arabi uses. In the first there is a redundant article of similitude, where the verse is read, "There is nothing like Him." In the second reading the article is not considered redundant, and the verse is read, "There is nothing like His likeness." This distinction comes up several times in the *Ringstones*.

[167] The relevant passages from chapter 71 are the following: *He said, 'O my people, I am unto you a clear warner, saying, "Serve God, and fear Him, and obey you me, and He will forgive you your sins…" He said, 'My Lord, I have called my people by night and by day, but my calling has only increased them in flight. And whenever I called them, that Thou mightest forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, and wrapped themselves in their garments, and persisted, and waxed very proud. Then indeed I called them openly; then indeed I spoke publicly unto them, and I spoke unto them secretly, and I said, "Ask you forgiveness of your Lord; surely He is Ever-forgiving, and He will loose heaven upon you in torrents and will succour you with wealth and sons and will appoint for you gardens, and will appoint for you rivers… Noah said, 'My Lord, they have rebelled against me, and followed him whose wealth and children increase him only in loss, and have devised a might device and have said, 'Leave not your gods, and do not leave Wadd, nor Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq, or Nasr.' And they have led many astray. Increase Thou not the evildoers save in error!' And because of their transgressions they were drowned, and admitted into a Fire… And Noah said, 'My Lord, leave not upon the earth of the unbelievers even one. Surely if Thou leavest them, they will lead Thy slaves astray, and will beget none but unbelieving libertines. My Lord, forgive me and my parents and whosoever enters my house as a believer, and the believing, men and believing women; and do Thou not increase the evildoers save in ruin!'*

[168] 71:10

[169] 71:5

[170] Qashani comments upon this by incorporating all apparent disobedience into the inscrutable Will of God. Nothing can happen except by the leave of God, and everything that does happen is in its own special way a part of the Divine Glory. Even the disobedience of Satan goes to the glory of God, opening the door to greater perfections. Thus even disobedience is a kind of praise and glorification, expressing as it does the all-comprehensiveness of God. Qaysari comments that the souls of the people were not ready to acknowledge the message openly, although they acknowledged it through their actions. In a sense, whether consciously or not, through their actions they were asking for the Divine Subjugation to appear so that it could bring them from their imperfect state to a state of perfection, for a Divine self-disclosure to overcome their inability to acknowledge the messenger. On the surface it

contained within it; now, the reality of things is *Qur'an*, not *Furqan*. One who stands firm in the *Qur'an* pays no heed to *Furqan*, though it be within it. *Qur'an* contains *Furqan*, but *Furqan* does not contain *Qur'an*.[171] For this reason Muhammad, may God bless them and grant him peace, was conferred the distinction of the *Qur'an*, for this is *the best of communities brought unto mankind*.[172] *Naught is there like unto His likeness*,[173] brings together these two realities into a single reality. If, in his words, Noah had come saying something akin to this verse, they would have responded to him, for He asserted similarity and incomparability in a single verse, indeed, in half a verse.[174]

Noah called his people *by night* in virtue of their intellects and their spiritual aspects, and these are invisible. *By day*, that is, he also called them in virtue of their manifest forms and their senses. He did not achieve a synthesis in his call to compare with *Naught is there like unto His likeness*, and so their inward aspects shunned this *Furqan*, and thus he increased them in their flight. Then he said of himself that he called them so that He may forgive[175] them—not that He may unveil *for* them. This is what they understood of him, may God bless him and grant him peace. For this reason, *They put their fingers in their ears, and wrapped themselves in their garments*,[176] all of which constitute the form of the covering over to which he called them. They responded to his call with action,[177] not with *Labbayk.*[178] In *Naught is there like unto his likeness*, there is both affirmation of likeness and its negation, and by virtue of this did the Prophet say of himself, may God bless him and grant him peace, that he was given the all-comprehensive words.[179] Muhammad, may God

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would appear as punishment, but as Ibn al-'Arabi repeats over and over again the Divine Mercy overcomes the Divine Wrath, and ultimately all things come to reside in the Divine Mercy.

[171] In this passage the word *Qur'an*, which is ordinarily derived from the root q-r-', a root carrying the meaning of recitation or reading, is instead seen as deriving from the root q-r-n, meaning to connect or join together. This is the opposite of the meaning of the root f-r-q (to separate or disjoin), from which *Furqan* (criterion or discrimination, one of the other names of the Qur'an) is derived. *Furqan* is here associated with the assertion of incomparability, separating God from the world and denying his presence therein by emphasizing His transcendence. *Qur'an* is that perspective which affirms God's presence in the things of the world without for all that denying His transcendence. It 'joins' *tanzih* to *tashbih*. Thus *Qur'an* contains *Furqan*, while the reverse is not true.

[172] 3:110

[173] 42:11

[174] The half he is referring to here is, *Naught is there like unto His likeness*, the other half being, *And He is the Hearing, the Seeing*.

[175] The verb *ghafara* has the meaning of covering over sins, which goes along with the symbolism of this paragraph.

[176] 71:2

[177] The word for forgiveness carries with it the sense of "to cover over". Their response to the invitation to this covering over was to cover themselves with their garments and to place their fingers in their ears.

[178] Cf. Ringstone of Seth

[179] A reference to a tradition in Bukhari 91:22, "I was sent with the all-comprehensive words (*jawami' al-kilam*)…" On these all-comprehensive words the Shaykh has this to say, "When God taught Adam

bless him and grant him peace, did not call his people by day and by night; rather he called them by night in the day, and by day in the night.

Noah, in his wisdom, said unto his people, *He will loose heaven upon you in torrents*,[180] these being the intellectual sciences dealing with meanings and discursive thought. *And will succor you with wealth*,[181] that is to say, that by means of which He takes you unto Himself, and when He takes you unto himself you will see your own forms in Him. Whosoever amongst you imagines that he sees Him knows not, and whosoever amongst sees himself is the one who knows.[182] For this reason mankind is divided into those who know and those who know not. *And children*,[183] which is the result obtained by their mental reflections. Now, knowledge of this reality is dependent upon witnessing and is far removed from the results of thought. *Save in ruin*,[184] and *Their trade benefiteth them not*,[185] means that what they owned and which they imagined to be their wealth withdraws from them. For the Muhammadans,[186] this is,[187] *Give of what We have made thee vicegerents over*,[188] and for Noah, *Take not unto thyselves any guardian other than Me*.[189] Thus it is established that the wealth is theirs and that it is for God to guard over them. They have been entrusted with it as vicegerents. The wealth is God's and He is their Guardian, and so the wealth is theirs, thus being the wealth of the vicegerency. It is

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the names (Koran 2:30), he was in the station second to the station of Muhammad, since Muhammad had already come to know the all-comprehensive words, and all the Names are words.

"Muhammad was the greatest locus of divine self-disclosure, and thereby came to know 'the knowledge of the ancients and the later folk.' Among those of old was Adam, who had knowledge of the names. Muhammad was given the all-comprehensive words, and the words of God are never exhausted.

"The Messenger of God said, 'Were Moses alive, he would find it impossible not to follow me,' because of the all-inclusiveness of the Prophet's messengerhood and the all-embracingness of his Law; for he was singled out for things never given to any prophet before him, and no prophet was ever singled out for anything that Muhammad did not possess, since he was given the all-comprehensive words. He said, 'I was a prophet when Adam was between clay and water,' while every other prophet was only a prophet during the state of his prophethood and the time of his messengerhood." (Quoted from *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 240.)

[180] Qur'an 71:11 The following paragraphs are replete with short references to the Surah of Noah in the Quran, the relevant passages of which are quoted in the note above.

[181] 71:12

[182] This is an allusion to the point made in the Ringstone of Seth, to the effect that anything one witnesses by way of visions or auditions is none other than a manifestation of his own identity.

[183] 71:21 *'My Lord, they have rebelled against me, and followed him whose wealth and children increase him only in loss…*

[184] 71:28 *'…And do thou not increase the evildoers save in ruin!'*

[185] 2:16

[186] When Ibn al-'Arabi speaks of the Muhammadans, he is referring not only to the members of the community of Muhammad but also to a certain kind of soul that has been formed or manifests the particular characteristics of the Islamic revelation.

[187] This is a reference to the wealth they imagined was theirs.

[188] 57:7

[189] 17:3

in this way that God is the Owner of all wealth, as is spoken of by al-Tirmidhi,[190] may God have mercy upon him.

And they have devised a mighty device,[191] because calling upon God most high is a deception of He who is called upon, for indeed He was not absent from the beginning, and summons the end. *Call upon God*;[192] this is the very deception.[193] *With discernment*, calling attention to the fact that everything belongs to Him. He responds to them through deception, just as they had called upon Him.[194] Now comes the Muhammadan, and knows that the call occurs not with respect to His Selfhood, but only with respect to His Names,[195] and so He says, *On the day We shall muster together the godfearing to the All-Merciful with pomp*.[196] He spoke using the article of destination[197] and joined it to the Name so that we would know that the world is beneath the compass of a Divine Name which obliges them to be godfearing.[198]

In their deception they said, *Leave not your gods, and leave not Wadd, nor Suwa', Yaguth, Ya'uq, or Nasr*.[199] Had they left them, they would have been ignorant of the Real in the measure of what they had left. The Real has a face in every object of worship; whosoever knows it knows it, and whosoever is ignorant of it is ignorant of it. For the Muhammadan, *Thy Lord hath decreed that ye shall worship only Him*,[200] that is to say, He decided. The man of knowledge knows who is worshipped, and in what form He is manifest in order to be worshipped, and that separation and

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[190] Muhammad b. 'Ali, famous as al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, a Khurasani theologian and Sufi, d. 898. This is a reference to a question of Tirmidhi's in his *Kitab khatm al-awliya'* (Beirut, 1965). In this work he poses questions which he says can only be correctly answered by the elect among the saints. Chittick points out that Ibn al-'Arabi responded to them in his *al-Jawab al-mustaqim*, which he later included in an expanded form in Chapter 73 of the *Futuhat*. (See *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 396 n25)

[191] 71:22

[192] 12:108

[193] Supplication is a kind of "device" or "deception" (*makr*) because it implies a fundamental duality between the supplicant and God. Speaking from the point of view of absolute unity, Ibn al-'Arabi says that supplication to God implies that God was not present from the very beginning. In fact, the supplicant and his supplication are both manifestations of God. This only presents half of Ibn al-'Arabi's view on supplication or prayer, as is made clear in other parts of the *Ringstones*, where he speaks of the necessity and wisdom of praying. See for example the Ringstone of Job, p.***.

[194] Which is to say that the supplicant believes that he has called upon God and received a response, maintaining the illusion as it were, from the point of view of unity, of a duality.

[195] That is to say, when one calls upon God for something it is always in view of some particular Quality or another, never in view of the unqualified Essence.

[196] 19:85

[197] *Ila*, meaning "to" or "unto".

[198] If creatures will ultimately be gathered back to the All-Merciful (*al-Rahman*), which is often considered equivalent to the all-embracing Name *Allah* in accordance with the verse *Say: Call upon God or call upon the All-Merciful, whichever you may call, His are the Most Beautiful Names* (17:110), it follows that one should be godfearing in view of this inescapable compass which the Name or Quality has over us.

[199] 71:23

[200] 17:23. Ibn al-'Arabi is reading this verse as a metaphysical statement alluding to the fact that all things are manifestations of God, hence the impossibility of anything other than God being an object of worship.

multiplicity are like the bodily parts of a sensible form or the spiritual$_m$ faculties of a spiritual form. Naught but God is worshipped in any object of worship. The lesser man imagines there to be divinity within it. If it were not for imagining this he would neither worship stones nor anything else. For this reason He says, *Name them*,[201] for if they were to name them they would have named them 'stone', 'tree', or 'star'. If it had been said to them, "Who do you worship?" they would have said, "A divinity." They would neither have said, "God," nor, "The divinity." The greater man does not imagine there to be divinity within it, but rather says, "This is a locus for the divine self-disclosure, worthy of being magnified," and this he does without exclusion. The lesser man, the man of imagination, says, *We only worship them that they might bring us nigh in nearness to God*.[202] The greater man, the man of knowledge, says, *Your divinity is one divinity, so submit yourselves to Him*, that is, where He becomes manifest, *and give glad tidings to those who extinguish*,[203] referring to those for whom the fire of their nature has gone out. They say "divinity" but do not say "nature".[204] *They have led many astray*,[205] that is, they have caused them to become bewildered by the enumeration of the One through aspects and relationships. *Increase Thou not the evildoers*,[206] that is, who oppress their own souls. *The chosen ones*,[207] referring to those who inherit the Book, and who are the first of the group of three, which He placed before the lukewarm and the outstrippers[208]. *Save in error*, that is, except in the Muhammadan bewilderment: "Increase me in my bewilderment in Thee."[209] *In all that is illuminated for them they walk, and when darkness cometh upon them they fall still*;[210] for the bewildered one there are orbits and orbital motions around the pole, which he never leaves.[211] The man of the long path is oriented away from the goal, seeking after what is within himself, a companion of the imagination he has made his own end. He is possessed of "from", "to", and all that lies between.

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[201] 13:33
[202] 39:3
[203] 22:34
[204] That is to say, a natural object such as a stone or a tree.
[205] 71:24. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is reading the verses that outwardly censure wrongdoers as esoteric praise of those who are striving towards God. Thus being led astray is understood to be a reference to the bewilderment (*hayrah*) that occurs when the soul is presented with the glory of the Divine Truth, and those who "do wrong" or "oppress" (*zalim*) are acting, not against others, but against certain aspects of their own souls.
[206] 71:24
[207] 38:48
[208] A reference to 35:32, *Then We bequeathed the Book on those of Our slaves we chose; but some of them wrong themselves, some of them are lukewarm, and some are outstrippers in good works…* Here an equation is made between the chosen and those who wrong themselves. They are the elect (*mustafun*) precisely because they turn inward and battle their own souls. Ibn al-'Arabi interprets the fact that they are mentioned first in this verse as an indication of their superiority over the other two praiseworthy groups.
[209] This oft-quoted tradition does not appear in the major collections. See *Mu'jam*, p. 1263.
[210] 2:20

The man of the orbital motion has no beginning which would allow "from" to attach itself to him. Nor has he an end which would allow "to" to have any control over him. He is possessed of the most complete existence, and is bestowed with the all-comprehensive words and with wisdom. *Because of their transgressions*,[212] which were what drove them on to be drowned in the sea which the knowledge of God is, and which is bewilderment. *And admitted into a Fire*,[213] for the Muhammadans, this is within that very water. *When the seas are made to overflow*;[214] one fires up a flame when one kindles it.[215] *And they shall find themselves no helpers other than God*.[216] God is these very helpers of theirs, and they are forever annihilated in Him. If He were to bring them to the shore, the shore of nature, it would bring them down from this exalted degree, even though everything is God's, and *is* through God—indeed, *is* God.

Noah said, *My Lord!*[217] He did not say, "My divinity!" Now, "Lord" has immutability, while "the divinity" is variegated through the Names and *Every day is He upon some labour*.[218] By "Lord" he meant the immutability of differentiation,[219] since nothing else would be admissible. *Leave not on the earth*,[220] supplicating on their behalf in order for them to go to its interior. The Muhammadan: "If thou lowered a rope, it would alight upon God,"[221] and, *To him belongeth what is in the heavens and the earth*.[222] When you are buried in it, you are within in it and it is your encasement.[223] *We shall restore you into it, and bring you forth from it a second time*,[224] because of the diversity of aspects.[225] *Of the disbelievers*, who, *hide their*

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[211] The bewildered are always in the presence of the pole of the Divine Presence. Wherever their movements may take them, they are always determined by this single focus.
[212] 71:25
[213] 71:25
[214] 81:6
[215] The word for overflowing and the firing up of a flame are united by the root s-j-r in Arabic. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is giving fire the positive symbolism usually associated with water. In reality the fire is a mercy by which the passions of the souls are burned away.
[216] 71:25
[217] 71:26
[218] 55:29
[219] *Thubut al-talwin*. Qashani comments, "That is, immutability of His manifestation in a form that is in conformity with what he intended by his supplication; this is differentiation (*talwin*)." Qaysari comments that the immutability refers to the eternal relationship of Lord and subject (*marbub*), while the differentiation refers to the states of the supplicant. The Lord unchangingly—hence the immutability—addresses the needs of the ever-changing supplicant. "Divinity" does not have this same immutability—namely the relationship of Lord to that of which He is Lord—but can refer generally to all of the qualities.
[220] 71:26
[221] Tirmidhi, V:58
[222] 2:116
[223] Here the imagery of bodily death is being used to symbolize spiritual death. The heavens and the earth represent the corporeal world, and going to the "interior" signifies transcending this world. Noah's supplication is read as a call for deliverance as opposed to punishment.
[224] 20:55

heads within their garments and place their fingers in their ears,[226] seeking covering. He called to them so that He might forgive them, and forgiveness is a covering. *Any to dwell*;[227] anyone, so that the benefits may spread universally, just as the supplication was universal. *If Thou leavest them*, that is, call them and leave them, *they will lead Thy slaves astray*,[228] that is, they shall cause them bewilderment and shall take them from the slavehood to the secrets of dominicality contained within them, and thus they shall look upon themselves as lords after having seen themselves as slaves, being then slave-lords.[229] *And will beget*, that is, they shall only produce and only manifest *transgressors*,[230] that is, one who covers over, after its manifestation, what had become manifested. First they make manifest what was covered, then cover it after its manifestation. Thus the onlooker will not be able to learn the intention of the transgressor in his transgression, nor that of the disbeliever in his disbelief, and these are the same person.[231] *My Lord forgive me*,[232] that is, cover me and cover because of me, so that my worth and my station may be unknown, just as Thy worth is unknown as spoken of in Thy Words, *They rate not God at His true worth*.[233] *And my parents*,[234] these two forms of which I am the result, which are Intellect and Nature.[235] *And whosoever enters my house*, that is, my heart, *as a believer*, in conformity with the divine news contained within it, which

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[225] *Wujuh*. These can either refer to Qualities of God, or qualities of the resurrected soul. In either case the resurrection represents the manifestation of a possibility that is one among a "diversity of aspects". In the first case it is God as the Giver of Death and Giver of Life, and in the second it is a case of an immortal soul whose very nature as an *immortal* soul demands a second life.

[226] 71:7

[227] 71:26

[228] 71:27

[229] For Ibn al-'Arabi bewilderment is usually associated with the discovery of the divine presence within things or within oneself. Here he is speaking about the dangers of overemphasizing the immanence of God and the divine or dominical nature of man, thus seeing oneself as a 'lord'. In this state of bewilderment one may forget that one is still a slave and that God is transcendent and is to be asserted incomparable (*munazzah*).

[230] 71:27

[231] Disbeliever (*kafir*) as "one who covers" is the shade of meaning being emphasized here. According to the positive interpretation (given by Qaysari) these are the knowers who are overcome by their spiritual states and unveil spiritual realities and verities, and who subsequently come out of their spiritual states and veil what they had exposed. This, he says, accounts for the outwardly bizarre and sometimes scandalous behavior of some Sufis. According to the negative interpretation (given by Qashani) the arrogation of the quality of being lord is a false manifestation that can only but be veiled, because by definition the Lord is hidden and the slave is manifest. Through destroying the false presumption of divinity, that which was illusorily exposes is then veiled once again. In both cases the one who unveils and the one who veils are the same being who causes confusion and bewilderment in the onlooker.

[232] 71:28

[233] 6:91

[234] 71:28

[235] The intellect (*'aql*) is active while nature (*tabi'ah*) is passive, corresponding to the masculine and the feminine. Qaysari comments that the Heart of man results from the union of the intellect, which is another name for the Spirit, with nature, which is none other than the Breath of the Merciful. The symbolism of wedding is discussed more fully in the Ringstone of Muhammad, p.***.

consists of what their souls speak.[236] *And the believing men*, namely the intellects, *and the believing women*, namely the souls.[237] *Increase thou not the evildoers*, referring to the darkness[238] of the Folk of the Invisible who are enclosed within the veils of darkness, *except in ruin*, that is, in their destruction. They do not know their own souls because they witness the Face of the Real to the exclusion of themselves. In the case of the Muhammadans, *All things perish save His Face*.[239] And ruin is destruction.[240] Whoever wishes to attain to the mysteries of Noah must ascend to the sphere of Noah.[241] This is to be found in our *Descents at Mosul*.[242] And God speaketh the Truth.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Holiness in the Word of Enoch[243]

Exaltedness consists of two attributions: exaltedness of place and exaltedness of rank.[244] *We raised him to an exalted place*.[245] The highest of places is the place around which the millstone of the world of the spheres rotates, and which is the sphere of the sun. It is there that there is to be found the spiritual station of Enoch, upon him be peace. Beneath it there are seven spheres, and above it are seven spheres; these are the fifteen. The spheres above it are the sphere of Mars, the sphere of Jupiter, the sphere of Saturn, the sphere of the lunar mansions, the black satin sphere (which is the sphere of the zodiacal signs), the sphere of the Footstool, and the sphere of the Throne. The others are the sphere of Venus, the sphere of Mercury, the sphere of the Moon, and the globes of the ether, air, water, and earth. By virtue of being the pole of the spheres it has an elevated place. As for the exaltedness of rank, it belongs to us, the Muhammadans. God most high says, *You are the most exalted ones, and God is with you*,[246] that is, in this exaltedness. Now, He transcends place

[236] A reference to a tradition. Bukhari 2:15, see Ringstone of Enoch.
[237] Again, in relationship to the intellect the soul (*nafs*) is passive, and in Arabic *nafs* is feminine while *'aql* is masculine.
[238] *Zulm* can be rendered both as wrongdoing or tyranny as well as darkness (*zalim*=evildoer).
[239] 28:88
[240] These preceding sentences refer to the state of perishing (*fana'*) which is commonly translated as annihilation. One of the goals of the spiritual traveler is to realize his own nothingness and the truth that all things are eternally perished (*fan*^{in}, from *fana'*) in God.
[241] At the beginning of the next chapter Ibn al-'Arabi provides one version of a list of the celestial spheres, and says that Enoch resides in the sphere of the sun. He does not specify here which sphere is that of Noah. On the doctrine of the spheres, see *The Self-Disclosure of God*, pp. xxx-xxxi.
[242] According to Austin, there is a manuscript of this unpublished work in Istanbul, Murad Molla 1236. (*Bezels*, p. 81)
[243] Idris in the Arabic.
[244] A theme which pervades this chapter is the distinction between the 'horizontal' superiority which Ibn al-'Arabi calls the exaltedness of place and the 'vertical' superiority he calls the exaltedness of rank. Here the former refers to one's worldly or cosmic position, while the latter signifies one's spiritual station.
[245] 19:57
[246] 47:35

but not rank.[247] When the deed-performing souls among us feel a certain fear, this aspect of togetherness is followed by His Words, *never shall He cheat you out of your deeds*.[248] Deeds seek after place, while knowledge seeks after rank. God brings together for us the two elevations: the exaltedness of place through action and the exaltedness of rank through knowledge.[249] Then, to make Himself incomparable with the participation of the aspect of togetherness, He says, *Glorify the Name of thy Lord, the Most High*.[250] That is to say, glorify Him beyond this participation in meaning.[251]

Among the most wondrous of things is that man is the most exalted of creatures, and I refer to Perfect Man, while this exaltedness is related to him only in a dependent way, be it with respect to place or with respect to rank, which is one's degree. His exaltedness does not belong to his essence. He is exalted through exaltedness of place or through exaltedness of rank; exaltedness is proper to these two. As for exaltedness of place, *The All-Merciful mounted the Throne*,[252] which is the most exalted of places.[253] As for the exaltedness of rank, *All things perish save His Face,*[254] *To Him the whole affair shall be returned*,[255] and *Is there a divinity along with God?*[256] Now, God most high says, *We raised him to an exalted place*,[257] making "exalted" a description of "place", and *Thy Lord said unto the angels 'I am placing a Vicegerent on earth'*,[258] which is the exaltedness of rank. Regarding Iblis, who was among the angels, He says, *Hast thou arrogated thyself, or art thou among the exalted ones?*[259] He thus made the angels possessors of exaltedness. If this were due to their being angels, all angels would be included in this exaltedness. Now, since we know that it does not apply universally, even though they participate in the

[247] That is to say, God can never be the most exalted body among bodies, but He can be spoken of in as the origin of the vertical hierarchy of being, and hence as the most exalted in terms of rank (*makanah*).
[248] 47:35
[249] The deed-performing souls are those whose spiritual path is based on activity in the world. Because those who follow this way of action are also aware that there is no commensurability between God and their domain of activity, acknowledging that it is only with respect to knowledge and spirit that God can be "with" us, since He can never be with us as a body among bodies, they are reassured by the verse that they shall not be cheated out of their deeds. Deeds or works are associated with "place", i.e. the corporeal domain, but their spirit is the realm of knowledge, because the way of works must ultimately have knowledge at its core. Another way of saying this is that the merit of the horizontal path of action lies precisely in the fact that it advances the spiritual traveler along the vertical path of knowledge.
[250] 87:1
[251] That is, in the meaning or idea of exaltedness through rank, since from one point of view God is beyond any such comparison.
[252] 20:5
[253] The Throne (*'arsh*) is the pinnacle of the cosmos, and its sphere is the highest, as was mentioned above.
[254] 20:5
[255] 11:123
[256] 27:60
[257] 38:75
[258] 2:30
[259] 38:75. The "exalted ones" (*'alun*) is a reference to the archangels.

definition of what it is to be an angel, we know that this exaltedness of rank is with God. The same is the case with the vicegerents of mankind: if the exaltedness achieved by means of their vicegerency was essential, each man would have it. Since we know it does not apply universally, we know that this exaltedness belongs to rank.[260]

Among His beautiful names is the Exalted. Over whom, as there is naught but He? He is Exalted in His Essence. Or regarding what, it being naught but He? His exaltedness is His own. By virtue of existence He is identical with existent things. Those things we call "that which comes to be" are exalted in their essence, and are none other than He. He is the Exalted, but this is not the exaltedness of relation. This is so because the identities, which have an immutable non-existence within Him, have not sensed the odor of any existent. They are what they are in their state, although there is the plurality of forms in existent things. The identity is one among the totality and in the totality. The multiplicity of existence resides in the Names, which are relationships, and which are non-existential entities, and are none other than the identity which the Essence is. He is Exalted in Himself, and not through relation. From this perspective there is no exaltedness of relation in the world. However, the aspects of existence are ranked in excellence, so the exaltedness of relation exists in the one identity by virtue of the multiple aspects. That is why we say of it, "He not He," and "Thou not Thou."[261]

Al-Kharraz,[262] may God most high have mercy upon him, who was a face of the Real and a tongue by which He spoke of Himself, said that God can only be known through the uniting of opposites, in determining Him by them.[263] *And He is the First, the Last, the Manifest, and the Hidden.*[264] He is the very thing that is manifest, and He is the very thing that is hidden in its manifestation. None sees Him other than He, and no one is hidden from Him. He is the Manifest in Himself, and the Hidden from Himself. He bears the Name of Abu Said al-Kharraz, among other names belonging to things that come to be. The Hidden says "No" when the Manifest says "I", and the

[260] Men, like angels, occupy various places in the vertical hierarchy. For angels the hierarchy is determined by their function, whereas for man it is a function of spiritual realization or knowledge. Exaltedness is thus not essential to what it is to be man nor angel, but depends on what their rank actually is. This rank depends upon God, who is the measure of all exaltedness.

[261] This paragraph unfolds an instantaneity of two angles of vision, the first being that of absolute oneness and the second that of manifested multiplicity. Here Ibn al-'Arabi modulates back and forth between the perspective of God as beyond relationality and the perspective of God as the Principle of the plurality of forms, hence exalted in relation to them. From the first perspective the Names and the immutable identities are seen in their non-existential reality as simple attributions and relations, and in the latter perspective they are seen as the archetypal realities from whence spring all of the concrete existents of the world. These two perspectives are quintessentially expressed in, "He not He (*huwa la huwa*)," and, "Thou not thou (*anta la anta*)," meaning that in one sense God is identical with all things, while in another sense the world is "that which is other than God (*ma siwa'Llah*)".

[262] Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz, a Baghdadi Sufi who died in 899.

[263] That is to say, in making a judgment about God employing the use of opposite qualities.

[264] 57:3

Manifest says, "No" when the Hidden says "I". This is so with every opposite: the speaker is one and is the same as the listener.[265] The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, says, "What their souls spoke."[266] They speak and listen to their speaking, having knowledge of what their souls spoke. The identity is one while the determinations differ. There is no way of failing to know the likes of this, for every man knows this in himself. Each is a form of the Real.[267]

Affairs become confused, and the numbers become manifest by means of one within the known levels.[268] One existentiates the numbers, and the numbers unfold one. The determinations of numbers can appear only in what is numbered. What is numbered can have either non-existence or existence. The thing can be non-existent with respect to sense perception while existent with respect to the intellect. It must needs be that there is number and what is numbered.[269] Moreover there must needs be the one which generates them.[270] They are generated by means of it. Each level of number is a single reality—(Take for example nine, ten, anything smaller, or anything larger *ad infinitum*. None are a sum, but neither can any escape being called a grouping of ones. Indeed two is a single reality and three is a single reality, no matter what level one reaches, even though they are one.)—so none of them are identical with any other.[271] However, the fact of their being a grouping is predicated of them, and we speak of them in these terms, and it is judged to be present among them. In this discussion twenty levels appear.[272] Compounding enters therein, and thus one unavoidably affirms what one deems to be essentially negated.[273]

Whosoever knows what we have established concerning numbers, and that their

[265] With regards to the essence or what-it-is of the opposite qualities, it must be that insofar as one of them if affirmed the other is negated. However, in terms of existence or being it is God who is affirmed or denied in both cases; the opposition obtains from only one point of view.

[266] Bukhari 2:15, "God will pass over my community what their souls spoke, so long as they did not speak it or act it out."

[267] Ibn al-'Arabi is making an analogy between man's knowledge of himself and the multiplicity of qualities in the Divine Reality. The one who speaks to himself (or his soul, both of which are valid translations of *nafsuhu*) is a self speaking to itself. Man's own experience of his own consciousness symbolizes the coincidence of unity and multiplicity. When one says, "I speak to myself," there is clearly a unity, which is necessarily implied in the very words "I" and "myself". From another point of view there is necessarily a multiplicity, since there exists an "I", an act of consciousness, and an object of that consciousness.

[268] Confusion arises due to the apparent multiplicity in unity, which Ibn al-'Arabi proceeds to explain in terms of the generation of numbers from one.

[269] Quantity is not something that stands on its own. It is an accident of some substance, whether this substance be a concrete entity or a concept in the intelligence.

[270] That is, the numbers.

[271] This rather awkward structure is called for by the layout of this passage in the Arabic.

[272] These twenty levels mentioned are the numbers 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,20,30,40,50,60,70,80,90,100, and 1000.

[273] The compounding (*tarkib*) is the dual way in which number is considered. From one point of view each number is a reality in and of itself, while from another point of view it can be seen as 1+1+1… If one considers the essence of 3 to be 1+1+1, then this is denied by the affirmation that 3 is a reality that

negation is their affirmation, knows that the Real, who is deemed incomparable, *is* creation, which is deemed similar, even though creation is distinguished from the Creator. The affair is the Creator-created, and the affair is the created-Creator. All of this comes from a single identity. No, rather it is the single identity and is the many identities. So contemplate what you see: *He said, 'O father, do as thou art bidden.'*[274] The son is identical with his father. He did not see that he was sacrificing anything other than himself. He ransomed him with a great sacrifice. He who had manifested in the form of a ram manifested in the form of a man. He became manifest in the form of a son, nay, in the determination of a son who is identical with the father. *From him did He create his mate*.[275] He was wed to none other than himself. From him came the companion and the child, and the affair is one in number. Who is nature and who comes to be manifest out of it? We see that it[276] does not diminish through what manifests, and does not increase through what does not manifest. What manifests is none other than it, and it is not identical with what manifests, due to the variation of the forms in their determinations. So, one thing is cold and dry while another is hot and dry. They are united by dryness while being distinguished by something else. The uniting factor is nature, nay, the identity of nature.[277] The world of nature consists of forms in a single mirror, nay, of one form in diverse mirrors.[278]

And thus there is nothing but bewilderment, shattering one's vision, although the one who knows what we are saying shall not be bewildered. If a person is possessed of even greater knowledge, this is only so through the determination of the locus, and the locus is the very immutable identity. [279] Therein the Real is variegated in the locus of self-disclosure, and thus are the determinations He undergoes variegated. He receives every determination. He is determined by none other than that very thing wherein He self-discloses.[280] There is naught but this.

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is not simply the sum of three ones. These two perspectives can be illustrated by comparing a triangle to three unconnected line segments.

[274] 37:102, a reference to the Quranic account of Abraham and the sacrifice of Ishmael. Ibn al-'Arabi discusses this topic at greater length in the Ringstones of Isaac and Ishmael.

[275] 4:1

[276] That is, nature.

[277] The identity or essence (*'ayn*) of nature is none other than the Divine Reality itself.

[278] Ibn al-'Arabi apparently contradicts himself in several sentences of this paragraph, but in reality it is an extended meditation on the phrase, "He not He." The son is identical with the father and the companion is identical with his mate by virtue of the oneness of Reality, whereas they are different from the point of view of their essences and determinations. When the world is considered as multiple forms in a single mirror, this is the perspective that sees all things reflected in the Divine Essence without any multiplicity being introduced therein. When it is considered as a single forms reflected in multiple mirrors, it is the Essence that is the form and the multiple mirrors are the identities of things.

[279] The degree of knowledge one will possess is determined by their archetypal reality, their immutable identity. It is spoken of as a locus with respect to its being a recipient of existence from God.

[280] From one point of view the Divine Essence is differentiated through the immutable identities, which determine what the self-disclosure will be through their preparedness or receptivity. He is determined

The Real, in some respect, creation is, so contemplate
Though not creation in that one respect, so comprehend
Whoever knows what I have said, his vision shall not fail
And only one possessing vision knows it
He unites and separates, for the identity is one
And it is many, not abiding, nor dispersing[281]

The Exalted in Himself is He who is possessed of the perfection in which are drowned all existential entities and all non-existential relationships, since it is not possible that any one of their characteristics should escape it,[282] no matter if they are praiseworthy with respect to custom, intellect, or law, or if they are blameworthy with respect to custom, intellect, or law.[283] It belongs only to the bearer of the Name *Allah*.[284] As for the bearer a name other than *Allah*, namely a locus of self-disclosure for Him or a form in Him, we say that if it is one of His loci of self-disclosure then a ranking in excellence occurs—and this must be so—among the loci. If it is one of His forms, then that form is identical with the perfection of the Essence, because It is identical with what appears in It.[285] What belongs to the bearer of the Name *Allah* is what belongs to that form. Let it neither be said that it[286] is He nor that it is not He. Abu'l-Qasim al-Qasi[287] alluded to this in his *Removal of the Sandals*, saying, "Every Divine Name can be named by all of the Divine Names, and can be described by them." This is so because every Name indicates the Essence as well as a meaning that is proper to it and requires it. By virtue of its indicating the Essence it possesses all the Names, and by virtue of it indicating a meaning by which it is unique it is to be distinguished from what is not itself, such as Lord, Creator, Giver of Forms, and so

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in the sense that an immutable identity can only receive existence in accordance with what it is. God could not grant it existence in any other way without destroying the essence of the immutable identity.

[281] The one possessed of vision sees things both in terms of unity and in terms of multiplicity, thus 'uniting' or seeing things as one, and 'separating' or distinguishing between things.

[282] Referring to the perfection of God.

[283] The existential entities are concrete things, while the non-existential attributions have no concrete existence. All things are loci of manifestation of God, and from the point of view of the Essence there is no separation or opposition and hence no evil. The question of evil arises when considering something in relation to something else, but for the divine perfection there is no 'something else'. The pure perfection or pure good corresponds to the perspective that all things are none other than God, whereas evil or blameworthiness is only considered if one acknowledges 'that which is other than God'. Thus, insofar as the world is real evil is real, but evil is a pure nothing inasmuch as the world is the self-disclosure of God and is plunged in Him.

[284] *Allah*, which I have always translated as God, is the all-comprehensive Name that contains all other Names, and hence names that which owns the all-comprehensive perfection. The bearer of the Name (*al-Musamma*, "the Named") is the Divine Essence.

[285] Here the forms refer to the other Divine Names, while the loci of self-disclosure refer to the entities that manifest from them. As Ibn al-'Arabi goes on to describe in this paragraph, each Divine Name names a single Essence, and hence each name is named by every other.

[286] That is, the form or the Name.

forth. The Name is the Named by virtue of the Essence, and the Name is not the Named by virtue of the meaning proper to it, by which it is set apart.

If you understand that the Exalted is that of which we have spoken, then you know that this is neither exaltedness of place nor exaltedness of rank.[288] The exaltedness of rank is particular to men of power, such as the sultan, the governors, the ministers, the judges, or any other person possessed of some position, regardless of whether they possess the aptitude for that position or not. The exaltedness of qualities is not so, for indeed it may be that the most knowledgeable of men is governed by a man who has a position of power, even though he himself may be the most ignorant of men. He is exalted in rank in a dependent way; he is not exalted in himself. When it leaves him his elevation disappears, but such is not the case for a man of knowledge.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Enchanting Love in the Word of Abraham

The Friend was only named "Friend" due to his permeation and encompassment of everything that the Divine Essence is describable as being.[289] A poet says:

I have permeated the spirit's path within me
By which the Friend was named the Friend

It is akin to the color that permeates the colored thing and becomes accident with respect to its substance. It is not like a place and a thing placed there.[290] From another point of view it was due to the Real's permeation of the form of Abraham, peace be upon him.[291] Each opinion is admissible, for indeed each opinion has a place where it can manifest, and beyond which it does not trespass. Do you not see the Real becoming manifest through the qualities of things which come to be—employing them to tell us about Himself—and with qualities of deficiency and qualities of blame? Do you not see that the created thing is manifest through the Qualities of the Real, from their[292] first to their last? It rightfully possesses them, just

[287] An Andalusian Sufi, d. 545
[288] Rank (*makanah*) is now being considered in terms of worldly position.
[289] *Khalil* ("friend") and *takhallul* ("permeation") are related by the kh-l-l root.
[290] The color of a thing is not separable from the substance of that thing; they are identical in the sense that the blue of the sky is none other than the sky. In the case of a thing occupying a place, one is dealing with two separate substances and hence there is no identity. Ibn al-'Arabi's thus considers the first to be the proper analogy to Abraham's assimilation of the Divine Qualities.
[291] The "it" refers to the fact of Abraham's being named "the Friend". In the first point of view it is Abraham who permeates the Divine form, while from the second point of view it is the God who permeates the form of Abraham.
[292] That is, the Qualities.

as they—that is, the qualities of things which come to be—are rightfully possessed by the Real. *Praise be to God*,[293] which means that the culmination of all praise, from all those who praise and are praised, stems from Him. *To Him the whole affair shall be returned*,[294] thus applying universally to the blameworthy as well as to the praiseworthy. Naught is there but the praiseworthy and the blameworthy.[295]

Know that whenever a thing is permeated by another thing, it bears it. Thus, what permeates is veiled by what is permeated. The passive participle is manifest, while the active participle is hidden and veiled. It is nourishment for it, like water that penetrates wool, causing it to grow and expand. If the Real be apparent and creation veiled within Him, then creation will be the totality of the Real's Names, His Hearing, His Vision, and all of His attributions and perceptions. If creation be apparent and the Real be veiled and hidden within it, then the Real will be creation's hearing, sight, head, foot, and all other faculties, as has been related in the authentic tradition.[296] Moreover, if the Essence were bereft of these relationships, it would not be a divinity. Our identities bring about the relationships. We make It Divine through our being objects of divinity. Thus He is not known until we are known.[297] The Prophet, upon him be peace, said, "Whosoever knoweth himself knoweth his Lord," and of all creation, he knows God best. Some thinkers, and with them Abu Hamid,[298] have supposed that God knows without seeing the world, but this erroneous. Yes, the Essence is known eternally and without beginning, but It is not known as a divinity until the object of divinity is known;[299] it is this which is an indication of it.[300] Then, after this, there is a state which grants you the unveiling that the Real Himself is the very indication of Himself and of His divinity, and that the world is naught but His self-disclosure in the forms of their immutable identities, whose existence would be impossible without it, and also that He is variegated and

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[293] 1:1

[294] 11:123

[295] All things exist somewhere on the scale of good and evil, but as was mentioned in the previous Ringstone the opposition between good and evil only comes into play if we acknowledge what is other than God. As self-disclosures of God, all things come from Him and are returned to Him. The verb translated by "returned" can also carry the meaning of "revert to" or "stem from".

[296] This is an exposition of the two points of view outlined above. Either God is in creation or creation is in God. From the first point of view creation represents all of the possibilities that lie 'hidden' in God, while from the second point of view God is veiled within things. The tradition mentioned here is the Divine saying of supererogatory works.

[297] This can be read also as "until we know", which is also a correct interpretation. According to the reading "until we are known", God cannot be known as Creator, for example, without creation being known. According to the reading "until we know", the reason creation is for God to be known, recalling the Divine Saying, "I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, so I created the world."

[298] Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali, the famous jurist, theologian, and Sufi, d. 1111.

[299] Again, this can be read either as "is known" or "knows".

[300] God knows Himself eternally, but in order to know Himself as Creator or Lord there must exist that in relation to which He is Creator and Lord. The world is an indicator of the divine precisely by virtue of standing opposite as "that which is other than God" and being dependent upon Him. In addition to His eternal knowledge of Himself God knows Himself through the endless possibilities of creation.

assumes form in accordance with the realities and the states of the identities. This comes after our knowledge of Him as being our divinity. Then comes the final unveiling, and our forms are manifest to you in Him, and each of us is manifest to the other in the Real, and each of us knows the other, and each of us becomes distinguished from the other.[301] There are those among us who know that in the Real this knowledge of ours occurs through us, and there are those among us who have no knowledge of the presence within which this knowledge through us takes place. *I seek refuge in God, lest I be one of the ignorant folk*.[302] Taking the two unveilings together, let it be said that He determines us only through us; nay, we determine ourselves through ourselves, but in Him.

To this point He says, *God's is the most convincing argument*,[303] that is, against the veiled people, since they say to the Real, "Why hast Thou done such and such with is?" concerning things which run counter to their desires. *A tribulation was unveiled for them*,[304] which is what the knowers unveil *here*. Thus they see that the Real did not do to them what the others had supposed He did, and that it came from themselves. He knows them only as *what they are*.[305] Their argument is thus proven untenable, and the most convincing argument remains for God most high. If you were to say, "To what avail is His saying, transcendent is He, *If He had so willed, He would have guided the lot of you*?"[306] we would say that in *If He had so willed*, 'if' is an article of impossibility signifying an impossibility; He only wills what the affair *is*.[307] Now, the identity of the contingent thing allows both of a thing and its opposite

[301] After the knowledge that God is the divinity of the world, one comes to realize that all things are none other than self-disclosures of God Himself. It is none other than God who indicates His own divinity in the relationship of Creator-creation, Giver-recipient, etc… The world is thus brought to nothing and is forever perished in God (*al-fana'*), and the knowing subject thus realizes his own nothingness. In *fana'* all multiplicity is overcome by inescapable Unity. This state is sometimes called *jam'*, or union. The realization that all things perish and come to nothing in the face of the divine reality is followed by the realization that all things abide through God (*al-baqa'*). This state is sometimes referred to as *jam' al-jam'*, or the union of union, meaning that it unites unity and distinction. In *fana'* unity annihilates multiplicity, whereas in *baqa'* multiplicity is reflected in unity. To truly abide in God requires more than a simple acknowledgement that multiplicity is reflected in the mirror of the one divine Essence. The one who truly undergoes both unveilings experiences the world in its apparent multiplicity, but because this appearance is wholly transparent to him he equally experiences the unity that is inward to all things.

[302] 2:67

[303] 6:149

[304] 68:42, which is a reference to one of the tribulations of the Day of Judgment. Spiritual travelers try to accomplish in this world what everyone will be forced to undergo in the next world, the difference being that the traveler does so willingly. That is why the Sufis make a distinction between natural death and volitional death, following the saying of the Prophet, "Die before you die."

[305] Referring to their identities in their state of immutability.

[306] 6:149

[307] Here Ibn al-'Arabi is again asserting that knowledge depends upon the known thing, and similarly that will depends on that which is willed. That which is willed, moreover, depends upon that which is known, which is to say that God's knowledge of something is a precondition for Him to will it. The "if" is meant to signify a relationship of condition and result such that the result is an absurdity, as if one were to say, "If the sun came out at night, it would be day." Whether or not a being will be guided

as far as the judgment arrived at by intellectual reasoning is concerned. Of the two outcomes conceivable by the intellect, whichever occurs is what the contingent thing *was* in its state of immutability. As for the meaning of, *He would have guided*, it means that He would have made it clear unto you. Not every contingent thing in the world has its eye of discernment opened by God to see reality *as it is*. Among them is he who knows and he who does not know. He did not so will, and so did not guide all of them, and does not so will. The same is the case with, "If He so willeth." Does He will this thing which *is* not? His Will is one in its attachment. It is a relationship that depends upon knowledge, which itself is a relationship that depends upon the known thing, and the known thing consists of you and your states. Knowledge has no effect on the object of knowledge. Rather, the object of knowledge has an effect on knowledge. From itself it grants it *what it is* in its identity. The Divine Address is given only in accordance with that to which those who are addressed can conform, and in accordance with the products of intellectual reasoning. The Address is not given in accordance with what is granted by unveiling. For this reason, the believers are many, and the knowers, the men of unveiling, few.[308]

None of us is there, but has a known station.[309] This[310] is that by which you *are* in your immutability, and is that by which you manifest in your existence.[311] Now, this is so if it be affirmed that you possess an existence. If it be affirmed that existence belongs to the Real and not to you, then without doubt the determination is yours *in* the existence of the Real. If it be affirmed that you are the existent, then the determination is yours without doubt—although the one who determines is God. All He does is to emanate existence upon you, and the determination is yours and is over you.[312] You praise none other than yourself, and you lay blame on none other than

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is a function of what it is in its archetypal reality, and God cannot will for a thing other than what that thing is.

[308] When God addresses a human collectivity He must take into account the receptivity of the people in it. Only a select few will ever attain to direct knowledge of the nature of reality, which is why people are addressed in a way that corresponds to human reasoning and reflection. As Ibn al-'Arabi made clear in the Ringstone of Noah, the language used to address the collectivity contains a kernel which is meant for the spiritual elite.

[309] 37:164

[310] That is, the known station.

[311] Here existence is used to mean external manifestation, in opposition to immutability or non-manifestation.

[312] It must be recalled here that determination (*hukm*) refers to making a thing be what it is, i.e. the specification or manifestation of an essence. What is it that determines or controls what a thing is or will be? This question is being considered from the point of view of God and from the point of view of the existent entity. Where Ibn al-'Arabi says, "If it be affirmed…" this can be understand to mean, "If one takes as one's starting point." If we begin from the starting point that all existence belongs to God, then the determination belongs to you in the sense that your immutable identity is a possibility within existence and could not be other than what it is, and in this sense the immutable identity determines what it itself will be. If we begin from the starting point that you possess your own existence, then naturally it is you who determine what you are and what qualities you will possess. Ibn al-'Arabi does not lose sight of the fact that ultimately it is God who determines, but as usual he shifts back and forth between the two complementary angles of vision. You determine what you are, but it is

yourself. All that remains for the Real is the praise of the emanation of existence, because this belongs to Him, not to you. You are His nourishment through the determinations, while He is your nourishment through existence.[313] Whatever is identified as yours is identified as His. The affair proceeds from Him to you, and from you to Him.[314] However, you are referred to as being charged with responsibility, and He charged you with responsibility through what you said to Him, namely, "Charge me with responsibility," which you spoke through your state and through *what you are*. He is not to be referred to as being charged with responsibility.[315]

He praises me and I praise Him
He serves me and I serve Him[316]
In a state I do acknowledge Him
And in identities I do deny Him
He knows me while I do deny Him
And I know Him and I witness Him[317]
What freedom from need can there be, while I
Help Him and give Him joy?[318]

God who bestows existence upon all things, and it is this needfulness for the emanation of *wujud* that characterizes all that is other than God. In saying that, "The determination is yours and is over you (*al-hukm laka 'alayk*)," he sums up the two perspectives mentioned above: we determine from one point of view and are determined from another.

[313] We 'feed' God in being His self-disclosures and as manifestations of the divine All-Possibility, while we 'feed' on God by virtue of the emanation of *wujud.* On this question Titus Burckhardt has this to say, "Ibn al-'Arabi compares this penetration [of God and man] to the assimilation of food, which is a symbol of the assimilation of knowledge. God 'feeds' on man and for his part man 'feeds' on God; he 'eats' God. The ritual expression of the former of these modes is to be found in sacred hospitality, the traditional model of which is the hospitality of Abraham to the Angels of the Lord and to the poor. He who gives food to the 'divine guest' gives himself as food to God. And this recalls the Hindu proverb that 'man becomes food for the Divinity he adores'. The second mode corresponds to the invocation of God, for, by the enunciation of the Name of God, man assimilates to himself the Divine Presence. The Christian Eucharist clearly symbolizes this same aspect of Union." *An Introduction to Sufism*, p. 81.

[314] Whatever qualities are specified as belonging to us perforce belong to God by virtue of the relationship of identity and dependency we have with Him. It is existence that proceeds from God to us, and in a sense it is our very essence or identity which proceeds from us to God and functions as the receptacle for His emanation of existence.

[315] The word used for being charged with responsibility (*taklif*) is traditionally used to denote the fact that man is answerable to God for carrying out certain acts and abstaining from others. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is reminding us that our existence as responsible beings is traceable to our own archetypal reality. It is a dimension of the needfulness of all things for God, and is a way in which God determines us. In reality God is determined by nothing, which is why Ibn al-'Arabi says that He is not referred to as something passive (*mukallaf* instead of *mukallif*, which is the active participle of *taklif*).

[316] This echoes the relationship spoken of above in terms of 'nourishment'. We serve God, but God also 'serves' us by manifesting us and giving us existence.

[317] God always knows man in all his states, but as man passes from state to state his awareness and acknowledgment of God fluctuates.

[318] That is to say, God could not manifest His Qualities without creation.

For this the Real did make me be
I know Him and I make Him be
Of this the Saying[319] *did relate*
And in me made its purpose real

Because the Friend possessed this station by which he was named the Friend, he established the wont of hospitality. Ibn Masarrah placed him with Michael for bounties.[320] It is through bounties that the recipients of bounty are nourished. When the bounty permeates the essence of the recipient of the bounty such that all that remains therein is its permeation, the nourishment flows in all the parts of the nourished thing. However, here[321] there are no parts, so it must needs be that the divine stations we call Divine Names permeate. It is through them that His Essence, majestic and exalted is He, is manifest.

We are His, as our guidances
Have shown, and we are our own
He hath naught but my being
For, "We are His" is likeness to "We are through us."
I have two faces, He and I
He hath no "I" in "I"[322]
But hath in me His locus where to manifest
And so, like a vessel, we are His

And God speaketh the Truth, and guideth unto the Path.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Real in the Word of Isaac

By an animal's offering as sacrifice was ransomed a prophet[323]
How far is the sound of a ram from the cry of a man!

[319] A reference to a Divine Saying, "I was a hidden treasure…"
[320] Qaysari points out that in chapter thirty-one of the *Futuhat* the Shaykh writes, "Ibn Massarah, one of the greatest of the People of the Path in knowledge, state, and unveiling, has said, 'The carried Throne is the Kingdom (*al-mulk*), and it is encompassed by body, spirit, food, and hierarchy. Adam and Israfil are for forms, Gabriel and Muhammad for spirits, Michael and Abraham for bounties, and Malik and Ridwan for threats and promises.'"
[321] That is to say, since we are speaking about God.
[322] Each person has an aspect in which he is himself and an aspect in which he is none other than the divine Self. In this sense man has two "I"s, but God has only the one supreme "I".
[323] Referring to the well-known story where Abraham sees a vision of himself sacrificing his son, and both father and son seek to obey what they see as a command from God. At the last moment, God orders Abraham to replace his son (Ishmael in the Islamic tradition, Isaac in the Judeo-Christian tradition) with a ram.

Yet God the Sublime made it[324] *great, as a kindness*
For us—or for it, I know not by what measure
Cattle are no doubt in value esteemed
But are lesser than rams as an offering of sacrifice
I know not how a single small ram could
Itself take the place of the Vicegerent of the All-Merciful
See you not how this affair has its ordering,
Fulfillment of profit and decrease of ruin?
There is no creation more high than the mineral, and
After it plants, in accordance with measures
Then possessors of sense, after plants, and all know
Their Creator through unveiling and clear proof[325]
Now, he who bears the name Adam is bound
By intellect, thought, or the necklace of faith[326]
Of this Sahl[327] *spoke, and like us one who realizes*
For we, as do they, do reside in virtue
Whosoever hath witnessed what I have witnessed
Will say what I say, both in secret and openly
Pay no heed to words contradicting our own
And sow not any grain in the wilderness
These are the deaf and dumb the Inerrant One[328] *spoke of*
Through words of the Quran, so that we might hear

Know ye, may God strengthen us and strengthen thee, that Abraham the Friend, upon him be peace, said, *Indeed in my sleep I see myself sacrificing thee*.[329] But sleep is the presence of the imagination, and he did not interpret it. The ram had become manifest in the form of Abraham's son in his sleep, and Abraham deemed the dream to be true. His Lord redeemed him from Abraham's imagining through the *great sacrifice*,[330] which was the interpretation of his dream in the sight of God, and of which he was unaware.

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[324] That is, the ram, in accordance with calling it a *great sacrifice* (37:107).
[325] Here Ibn al-'Arabi may be alluding to the fact that the most simple things reflect the highest principle. A diamond, for example, manifests the adamantine and luminous nature of the spirit in a direct yet limited way. Man, from this angle of vision, veils within himself the exalted aspects which are manifested openly in the mineral world.
[326] Man is limited in his knowledge of God to the extent that his notion of God is limited to his own particular belief, his "divinity of beliefs". Although the lesser creatures can never achieve the knowledge of man, they are never more or less than what their original nature grants them, and all glorify and praise God as is mentioned many times in the Quran.
[327] Sahl al-Tustari, d. 896, author of an esoteric commentary on the Quran, fragments of which survive in the commentary of Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, d. 1021.
[328] Referring to the Prophet.
[329] 37:102

The self-disclosure of forms in the presence of the imagination requires another science by which one grasps what God intended by those forms.[331] Witness how the

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[330] 37:107

[331] This introduces us to the science of dream interpretation (*'ilm al-ta'bir*), a subject that will appear again in the Ringstone of Joseph. The Shaykh uses the term imagination (*khayal*) in more than one sense. "Ibn al-'Arabi names imagination in its widest sense 'Nondelimited Imagination (*al-khayal al-mutlaq*)', since it designates the situation of all existence. He calls the intermediate world of imagination 'discontiguous imagination' (*al-khayal al-munfasil*), since it exists independently of the viewer. And he names the souls along with the faculty of imagination 'contiguous imagination' (*al-khayal al-muttasil*), since these are connected to the viewing subject." (*Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 117) As an isthmus (*barzakh*) between the realm of pure spirit and the world of bodies, the macrocosmic imagination (or discontiguous imagination) possesses characteristics of the two realms for which it is a *barzakh*. It is more gross than the realm of spirit but is more subtle than the world of bodies. The imaginational world is also called the world of image or likeness (*'alam al-mithal*), because the forms therein are similar to the forms of the corporeal world inasmuch as they are both "formal", when "form" (*surah*) is considered in opposition to "meaning" (*ma'na*). The imaginational and corporeal worlds comprise the realm of extension, both static (space) and dynamic (time). The objects in both worlds are characterized by the accidents of quantity, quality, relation, etc… By virtue of being clothed in the accidents of spatio-temporal extension objects possess a form with spatio-temporal dimensions, again only when we consider "form" in opposition to "meaning" or "essence". As for the similitude or likeness of the imaginational world with the world of spirits, the imaginational world is 'luminous' like the world of spirits while the world of bodies is 'dark'. The entities in the imaginational world are not limited by the conditions of the corporeal world, which is why the possibilities of manifestation in the imagination are virtually limitless in comparison with the possibilities of the corporeal world. That which is impossible in the corporeal world can be possible in the imaginational world (such as a flying horse).

All things in the world of bodies can be seen as a combination of meaning and form. The soul is able to discern the meanings that are expressed by a given form in the world, and is able to retain both the meanings and the forms within itself. Moreover, when the soul recalls these meanings and forms it is able to separate the two from one another and recombine them to create new objects that have no existence outside of the subject's imagination. This discernment also allows the soul to detect a common meaning or essence that is present in two different forms. For example, a person can perceive hostility in a man and kindness in a woman. The form of the man and the woman express these meaning or essences of hostility and kindness. They enter into his memory as perceived, but the soul then has the power to imagine or picture kindness in the man and hostility in the woman, by virtue of his soul's power of separating and recombining forms and meaning into new objects of thought. This power of the soul to separate the complex "meaning-form" is one of the principles of dream interpretation.

While several forms may express the same meaning, they may do so with varying levels of directness and simplicity. The flight of an eagle expresses the meanings of freedom and elevation in more direct, simple, obvious, and unambiguous manner than does a person we know who has these as qualities of soul. A diamond expresses immutability more simply and directly than wood, even though wood also possesses a quality of immutability. The level of association and affinity between forms and meanings is necessarily taken into consideration when discussing the intermediate world and dream interpretation.

The level of the imagination functions as a *materia* for the level of the spirits, just as the level of bodies functions as a *materia* for the level of the imagination, which is the level of the soul precisely. The meaning will appear within the level of imagination as determined by the conditions and intrinsic nature of this level of existence. The imaginational level has an autonomous existence deriving from a Name which can be seen as 'begotten' of the Inward (*al-Batin*) and the Outward (*al-Zahir*), which as was mentioned in the introduction is a single Name or Quality that simply has no spoken counterpart. However, the nature of the imaginational world is to be receptive to the meanings that come from the spiritual world, and these meanings will appear in the imaginational world as determined by both the nature of the imaginational world itself as well as by the nature of the spiritual

Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, spoke to Abu Bakr concerning the interpretation of that dream, saying, "You are correct in part, and have

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meaning or essence. If I press my hand into still water, the resulting phenomenon is very different than if I had pressed that same hand into moist clay. The 'meaning coming down from above is the same, but the receptive material has a say in what the resulting appearance will be when this meaning-form comes into existence through the union of a spiritual reality with the 'stuff' of the imaginational world. Similarly, the new imaginational entity that comes into being may then itself manifest in the corporeal world. The corporeal world has an autonomous nature in relation to the imaginational world just as the imaginational world has in relation to the spiritual world. The conditions of the corporeal world together with the imaginational entity that manifests in it bring about a corporeal entity. Now the relationship of meaning-form is transposed from spirit-imagination to imagination-body. Insofar as corporeal objects result from the manifestations of the imaginational world they are combinations of the 'stuff' of the corporeal world and the determining power of the imaginational form. Now, the use of the word '*materia'* or 'stuff' can be misleading, because the nature of any level or mode of reality is none other than the manifestation of a divine Quality, as was mentioned in the introduction, and is not a collection of building blocks or pliable material. However, it is precisely because there is a hierarchy of dependency and relationality between the Names that we can speak about a given mode of reality as being receptive in relation to another, and the concepts of form and matter are useful in considering the relationship between different existential levels.

From one point of view there is only one world of imagination and from another point of view this one world is polarized into the macrocosmic and microcosmic imagination, or the discontiguous and contiguous imagination. The microcosmic imagination is called contiguous because it is connected to the whole individual as a part of the vertical hierarchy that makes up the individual. The presence of the imagination—another way of saying the imaginational level—is a single presence, but that part of it which is owned by a particular individual is *his* contiguous or microcosmic imagination. It is through this aspect of his soul that he is able to participate in the imaginational world.

A breeze in the corporeal world it produces a different effect on different objects. It will be received by a willow tree in a different way than a standing man. When a spiritual reality (meaning, *ma'na*) 'blows through' the imaginational presence it also produces an effect in accordance with the aspect of the imaginational presence with which it comes into contact. Man's share of the imaginational presence has as its raw material the sum-total of forms and meanings he has gathered from his experience. As was mentioned above, this raw material is the imagination as storehouse, but man also has a creative imagination that allows him to create new meanings and new forms. These new meanings and forms are more than simple rearrangements because the new wholes have an identity that is all their own. They are each a unique whole, not reducible to the sum of their parts. (From one point of view form and meaning, *surah* and *ma'na*, are separable only mentally). These new identities—forms and meanings—are in reality already a potentiality within the human soul by virtue of its being a total manifestation of all the divine Names and Qualities and hence of all possible forms and meanings. The recombinations constitute an actualization of a possibility that is already there. The incoming forms and meanings are limited to the corporeal entities with which we are familiar because man is still in the corporeal world. When he dies and leaves this body and acquires another he will find himself in a new world of experience.

Thus, man's imagination has an aspect towards himself and an aspect towards the greater (macrocosmic) imaginational presence. Within himself his imagination can receive either from above or from below, which is to say that it can be influenced by his psycho-somatic self or by his most inward heart, which transcends the imagination and is itself part of the spiritual world. When man's imagination receives from man's own heart—the spiritual center of his soul—he is in reality receiving from God without intermediary, through the unique connection that God has with every created thing. When he receives via his connection with the macrocosmic imagination, this can be from above (angelic) or below (demonic) but takes place through an intermediary because it comes from outside of himself. When the imagination is influenced by the activity of the psycho-somatic self it results in ordinary dreams that have no special connection with any spiritual or intellectual reality. The causes can range from an emotional preoccupation to indigestion.

erred in part."[332] Abu Bakr asked him to teach him where he was correct and where he erred, but he did not do so. God said to Abraham when he called him, *Thou hast been true to the dream*.[333] He did not say, "Thou hast been true to the dream concerning its being your son," because he did not interpret it. Instead he took the manifest aspect of what he saw, but dreams require interpretation.[334] The king spoke of this, saying, *If you are interpreters of dreams*.[335] Interpretation means to pass from the form that is seen to arrive at something else.[336] The kine were years of famine and abundance. Though he was true to the dream of sacrificing his son, he only affirmed the dream in its being identical with his son. In the sight of God it was none other than the *great sacrifice*[337] in the form of his son. He redeemed him from what occurred in the mind of Abraham, peace be upon him, but for God this was not a redemption in reality. Sense formed the sacrifice, and the imagination formed the son of Abraham, may God bless him and grant him peace.[338] If he had seen the ram in his imagination, he would have interpreted it as his son or something else.

Then God said, *This, indeed, was a clear trial*.[339] That is, a clear test, i.e., a test that is apparent, that is, a test of knowledge: would he have knowledge of the interpretation that the domain of dreams demands or not? He[340] knows that the domain of imagination requires interpretation, but *he* was not mindful and thus did not fulfill the rights of this domain. For this reason he deemed the dream to be true.

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[332] Bukhari 91:47. This refers to an incident where a man came to the Prophet and told him about a dream. Abu Bakr was present and asked the Prophet if he could be allowed to interpret it first. When he had finished his interpretation he asked the Prophet if had understood the dream correctly. The Prophet's response was, "You were correct in part, and you erred in part." When Abu Bakr asked the Prophet to inform him which part of his interpretation was mistaken he included an oath, "By my mother and father!" to which the Prophet's only response was, "Do not swear."

[333] 37:105

[334] Both Qaysari and Qashani understand this to mean that Abraham, as a prophet, was accustomed to receiving revelations and unveilings that required no interpretation. That was why when he was presented with the image of him sacrificing his son he took it to be a command from God, which both he and his son were willing to obey. Ibn al-'Arabi's point is to show that it was never God's intention for Abraham to sacrifice his son. Rather, as he says later, it was a test to see if Abraham would interpret it or not, in order to enlighten him and add to his knowledge the knowledge of interpretation. Abraham's son was only redeemed in the mind of Abraham, not in reality, because the form he saw in his dream was never really his son. The affinity between the ram and his son were their state of submission and obedience to the commands of God. This was the common meaning (*ma'na*) between the two forms.

[335] In the story of Joseph the king of Egypt says, *'I saw in a dream seven fat kine, and seven lean ones devouring them; and likewise seven green ears of corn, and seven withered. My counselors, pronounce to me upon my dream, if you are interpreters of dreams.'* (12:43)

[336] The root '-b-r also carries the meaning of crossing over or traversing.

[337] That is, the ram.

[338] Sensibles do not require interpretation as do entities of the imaginational level. The imagination formed the son of Abraham, because what is intended by an imaginational form is not that very form but a meaning that it conveys.

[339] 37:106

[340] Referring to God.

Baqi ibn Mukhallad,[341] the *imam* and author of the *Musnad*, did the same concerning his dream. He heard in a saying, which was well-established in his view, that the Prophet, may peace be upon him, said, "Whosoever seeth me during sleep hath seen me waking, for indeed Satan cannot assume my form."[342] Baqi ibn Mukhallad saw him, and in the dream the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, gave him milk to drink. (Baqi ibn Mukhallad deemed the dream true.)[343] He induced vomiting, thus vomiting the milk. If he had interpreted the dream, the milk would have been seen as knowledge. God forbade him much knowledge, in the measure of what he had drunk.[344] Do you not see that the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, was given a bowl of milk in his sleep, and said, "I drank until the satiety came out of my fingernails, and then I gave my bounty to Umar." It was said, "How dost thou interpret it, O Messenger of God?" "Knowledge," he said.[345] He did not leave it as milk, following the form he saw, for he knew the domain of dreams and the interpretation that it requires. It is known that the form of the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) witnessable by the sensory faculties is buried in Madinah, and that the form of one's spirit and subtlety is witnessed by no one in anyone, nor in oneself. Such is the case for every spirit. The spirit of the Prophet corporealizes in one's dream in the form of his body, as he was when he died, with nothing missing. It is Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, seen by virtue of his spirit, appearing in a bodily form resembling the interred body.[346] Satan cannot take on the form of his body, may God bless him and grant him peace; this is a protection from God for the person having the dream.[347] For this reason, let whosoever sees him in this form receive from him everything he commands, forbids, or gives news of, just as he receives legal judgements from him in the life here below in accordance with the words pronounced regarding them, which come from a text, something explicit, or something implicit—whatever it happens to be. If he gives one something, it is that to which interpretation is to be applied. If it comes out into the realm of sensory perception as it was in the realm of imagination, then that dream had

[341] In the Arabic this incorrectly appears as Taqi ibn Mukhallad. Baqi ibn Mukhallad was an Andalusian traditionist who died in 889. *Kashf al-zunun* 2:1679, Kahhalah, 3:53.
[342] Muslim 42:12
[343] That is to say, when he woke up.
[344] Although it is not explained at all in the commentaries, it seems that this means that Baqi ibn Mukhallad's vomiting of the milk in the dream symbolized his lack of receptivity to certain kinds of knowledge.
[345] Ibn Hanbal 2:83, 154
[346] Spirits as such are not perceptible. One can only witness a spirit (*ruh*) in a dream or in waking by virtue of the form which that spirit takes on when it manifests in the imaginational or corporeal world. When Ibn al-'Arabi says that the spirit corporealizes in the dream, what he means is that it takes on dimensions in the imaginational world that resemble those of the corporeal world.
[347] It is widely accepted in Islam that the devil cannot take on the form of the Prophet in a dream, implying that any dream of the Prophet, in the absence of obvious signs of falsehood, is truly a vision of him. "Whoever sees me in sleep, it is as though he has seen me waking. Satan cannot represent himself as me." Muslim 42:11

no interpretation.[348] It was upon this latter measure that Abraham, upon him be peace, and Baqi ibn Mukhallad both relied.[349] Since a dream has these two aspects,[350] and since God taught us *adab*—which is granted by the station of prophethood—through what He did with and said to Abraham, we know, concerning our vision of the Real appearing in a form that intellectual indications would deny, that we are to interpret that form as the Real of the Law, either as regards the state of the visionary or of the place in which he sees Him, or both of these together.[351] If intellectual indications do not deny it, we let it remain as what we saw. Remember that we shall see the Real in the Hereafter in the same way.[352]

The One, the All-Merciful hath in all places
Forms that are hidden and those that are manifest
If thou sayest that this is the Real, thou art truthful
If thou sayest another, then thou dost interpret[353]
His determination is not in one place as opposed to another
Nay, by the Real in creation it travels[354]
Whatever discloses itself to the eyes is
Denied by the intellects, persistent in proofs
Yet He is accepted in the intellects' loci of self-disclosure
And in what we call imagination, and the truest are the seers[355]

Of this station Abu Yazid says, "If the Throne and all it comprises were to be found

[348] Not everything in dreams is to be interpreted. Here Ibn al-'Arabi shows that part of the science of dream interpretation is to know what is to be interpreted and what is not.
[349] Both of them understood the dream in its most apparent sense and did not interpret it.
[350] That is, interpretation or understanding the apparent sense.
[351] By "intellectual indications" and the "Real of the Law (*al-Haqq al-mashru'*)" Ibn al-'Arabi is referring to the perspective of incomparability (*tanzih*), which is most closely associated with the Law and with intellectual reasoning. The intelligence under question is the one that is considered in legal matters, not intelligence or intellect (*'aql*) considered in its widest sense. Following the science of dream interpretation we should interpret a vision of God which takes the form of some cosmic entity as the very same God who is considered utterly transcendent by the mind governed by the Law (*shar'* or *shari'ah*). This interpretation must take into consideration the state of the visionary as well as the place where he had the vision. Both can have a bearing on the proper interpretation, since people are ranked in terms of their spiritual realization and places and times themselves possess a certain character. Thus, a vision seen by a spiritual master in the Ka 'bah on Friday may be interpreted differently than a similar vision experienced by a murderer in his bedroom on Tuesday.
[352] This is a reference to the tradition in Muslim 1:299, regarding the manifestation of God in various forms on the Day of Judgment. It is quoted in the Ringstone of Shu'ayb, p.***.
[353] The first point of view is that where the Manifester and the manifested are considered in their oneness, while in the second point of view this oneness is interpreted or "crossed over" and things are seen in terms of that which distinguishes one from another.
[354] God's determination over things is universal, and it is through God himself that this determination is present everywhere in creation.

in one of the corners of the heart of the knower one hundred thousand thousand times over, he would not sense it." This was the scope of Abu Yazid when it came to the world of corporeal bodies.[356] Indeed, I say that if what has infinite existence could be conceived of as having an end to its existence and placed in a corner of the heart of the knower, along with the Identity that existentiates it, he would have no sense of it in his knowledge. Indeed it has been established that the heart encompasses the Real,[357] and for that reason cannot be said to be satiable; if it were to be filled its thirst would be quenched. Abu Yazid also said that.[358] We teach of this station through these words of ours:

O Creator of all things in Himself
Thou dost encompass what Thou dost create
What thou dost create has no ending within thee
And Thou art the Narrow and Thou art the Vast
If all that God created were in my heart,
Its luminous dawn would not appear[359]
Whosoever encompasses the Real is not confined by
Creation. How is this, O listener?

Through imagination$_w$,[360] every man creates in his faculty of imagination that which possesses no existence except therein; this is the affair generally. Through willpower the knower creates that which possesses existence outside of the locus of the willpower,[361] although the willpower continuously preserves it so long as it is not burdened by this preservation, that is, by its preservation of what it has created. If forgetting of preserving what he created were to suddenly overtake the knower, that creation would become non-existent.[362] This would not occur if the knower had mastered all of the presences, not forgetting in an absolute fashion and witnessing

[355] Some people will always hold to the assertion of incomparability and deny certain loci of self-disclosure, while the true seers will acknowledge God not only intellectually but also in the forms of the imaginational and corporeal world.
[356] This refers to the way in which Abu Yazid spoke about the world to describe the heart of the knower. It is not meant to imply a limitation on Abu Yazid's level of spiritual realization.
[357] A reference to the Divine Saying, "My heavens and My earth encompass Me not, but the heart of My believing slave encompasseth Me." See *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 396.
[358] Qaysari points out that this is a reference to verses of Abu Yazid, "I drank Love, goblet after goblet, but the wine never dwindled, nor was I satiated."
[359] In the same way that the heart of the knower would not detect the Throne as spoken of by Abu Yazid, so too would it not see the light mentioned in the verse.
[360] This is a difficult instance where the two words I translate as imagination appear together (*wahm* and *khayal*). On *wahm* see note on p.***.
[361] Referring to the person's own soul, which is where the willpower originates.
[362] Every person possesses the ability to create forms in his own imagination, but the knower with the power of disposal (*tassaruf*) has the ability to create forms outside of himself. He is not able to bring it into being and then leave it to subsist on its own. Like the forms in his own imagination, the forms outside of himself stand in need of the imagining subject for their continued existence.

some presence without fail. When the knower, while possessing this grasp, creates what he creates through his willpower, that creation appears in its[363] form in every presence, and it becomes the case that some forms preserve others. When the knower forgets some presence or several presences while witnessing some other presence, which preserves the form of his creation that resides within it, all of the forms are preserved by means of the protection of that single form in the presence that he did not forget,[364] because forgetting never applies universally, neither for the generality not for the elite.[365] Here I have exposed a secret the likes of which the Folk of God continue to guard jealously, lest the refutation of their claim to being the Real become plain. For indeed the Real does not forget, while the slave necessarily forgets some things and not others. By virtue of preserving what he has created he can say, "I am the Real,"[366] but his preservation of it is not like the preservation of the Real, and we have made the difference clear. By virtue of forgetting a form and its presence the slave is distinguished from the Real. He must remain so distinguished, although he still protects all of the forms through protecting a single form among them in the presence which he has not forgotten. This is a protection by implication, but the Real's protection of what He creates is not like this. Rather, His protection of each form is particular to it.[367] This matter about which I have spoken has not been committed to writing by anyone in any book, neither by me nor by any other. It is to be found only in this book. It is unique in this time and is its precious gem, so beware lest you forget it. As for the presence wherein you remain present along with the form, its similitude is the book of which God says, *We have been remiss regarding nothing in this Book*.[368] It[369] comprises what has occurred and what has not occurred.

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[363] That is, the creation's.

[364] Any entity in a given level of existence is a manifestation of a reality at the level above it, and so forth until one reaches the level of the immutable identities. By virtue of preserving and not forgetting a form at a higher level of existence, the knower maintains the manifestation of that form at a lower level of existence by implication or necessary inclusion. Similarly, because a form cannot exist without the essence or meaning (*ma'na*) that it expresses, the preservation of a lower form necessitates the preservation of its meaning or essence in the same way that an effect necessitates its cause.

[365] One possible understanding of this sentence is that the knowers capable of disposal never simultaneously forget all the presences (levels of existence—corporeal, imagination, spiritual) in the same way that ordinary people are never heedless of all levels of reality simultaneously. In the case of the knower this would translate into a preservation of the form which they brought into existence, by virtue of the fact that they had "mastered all the presences". For the generality it would simply mean that their consciousness is always directed somewhere, even if it lacks a coherent focus capable of bringing something into being outside of themselves.

[366] A reference to the famous statement of al-Hallaj (d. 922) *ana'l-haqq*, or, "I am the Real."

[367] God's preservation of things is not subject to waning or oscillation and does not operate by virtue of a form in one presence preserving a form in another presence. God has an unmediated relationship with each and every thing, which from one point of view is not a relationship at all because all things are self-disclosures of His Essence.

[368] 6:38

[369] Referring to the Book mentioned in the verse. As a total manifestation of the Names of God, man is unique in possessing the capability to operate in all modes of reality, or presences. As mentioned above in the Ringstone of Noah, the Quran symbolizes synthesis and unification, and only a person

Only one who has the Quran in his soul knows what we speak of. As for the one who fears God, *He made for him a Criterion*. It resembles what we spoke of regarding the question of that by which the slave is distinguished from the Lord. This criterion is the highest criterion. [370]

There is a moment when the slave is lord, no doubt
And a moment when the slave is slave, no lie
If he be slave, he will be vast through the Real
If he be lord, he will be in a straitened life
In being slave he sees his very soul,
And, free of doubt, his hopes grow
In being lord he sees all creatures, which ask of him
From the presence of the Kingdom and of the Dominion[371]
Yet he is in himself unable to provide what they ask
And because of this will you see some knowers weep from it[372]
Be, then, a slave of the Lord, not the lord of His slave
Lest through attachment ye go into the Fire and the Casting

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Loftiness in the Word of Ishmael

Know that the Bearer of the Name God is one in Essence and is totality through the Names. Every existent has but a specific lord in God, it being impossible for it to have them all.[373] As for the divine unity, none[374] have a share in it, for one does not say that something belongs to one of them and something belongs to another, as it[375]

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who has the synthetic quality of soul to master all of the presences is able to use one presence as a way of preserving his influence in another.

[370] 8:29. On *furqan* and *Quran* again see Ringstone of Noah. As soon as one leaves Divine Unity the most important distinction, from the human point of view, is that between Lord and slave. The difference in the way in which creation is sustained is another criterion or differentiating factor between God and man, a theme which Ibn al-'Arabi goes on to discuss in the poem which follows.

[371] Kingdom (*mulk*) and Dominion (*malk,* which according to Qaysari signifies *malakut*) refer to the world of bodies and the intermediate world respectively.

[372] As the Vicegerent of God, man (and what is meant is Perfect Man) must provide for the needs of the creation for which God set him as vicegerent. In and of himself he is not able to provide what they ask of him. It is only through what God grants him that he is able to fulfill his function as vicegerent. The knowers weep because it is not from themselves but from God that these needs are provided for.

[373] In one of the manuscripts this sentence is followed by the phrase, "Each individual has a Name which is its lord. That individual is a body and it is its heart." As has been mentioned before, the immutable identities are forms of the Divine Names and Qualities. Each existent has an identity which is itself the form of a Name that determines what it is. It is this Name which is the lord of that specific existent. All existents except man, whose lord is the all-embracing Name *Allah*, have as their lord a specific Name amongst the totality of Names.

[374] "None" referring to existent entities.

[375] "It" meaning the divine Unity.

does not allow of partitioning. His unity is His entire totality in potency.[376] Happy is he who is well-pleasing to his lord, and there are none who are not well-pleasing to their lord, for that lord's lordship abides by him. Therefore that lord is well-pleased with him, and he is happy. Of this Sahl[377] said, "There is a mystery to lordship," which is you, and he is addressing every identity, "which, if it were to disappear, would annul lordship." He included the word "if", an article of impossibility signifying an impossibility.[378] Now, it does not disappear, and so lordship is not annulled, because no identity has existence except through its lord. The identity is perpetually existent, and so lordship is left perpetually un-annulled.[379] Anyone who is well-pleasing is beloved, and everything the beloved does is loved. Thus all of them are well-pleasing, because there is no act which belongs to the identity. Rather, the act belongs to its lord in it,[380] and the identity is satisfied in having an act related to it. It is "well-pleased" with the acts of the lord which appear in it and from it. "Well-pleasing" refers to the acts, for every doer and producer is well-pleased with what he has done and with what he has produced, for indeed he has fulfilled his obligation in giving full due to his act and to his production.[381] *He granteth*

[376] Here again we see the interplay of the two perspectives of unity and multiplicity. "In Essence," could also have been translated, "In Himself," meaning that the Divine Self is beyond multiplicity but nevertheless possesses an infinite array of Qualities, which are here referred to as a "totality" (*kull*). Considered from the point of view of the Self, no existent can have a "share" in the divine unity because as soon as one says "existent thing" one has entered into multiplicity and has by definition left unity; from the point of view of the Self there is only the Self. In saying that God's unity is potentially the totality Ibn al-'Arabi could not mean "potential" (*bi'l-quwwah*) in the sense of something which has yet to be actualized, because God is pure Actuality. Rather, one should say that from the point of view of the Qualities and the existents to which they give rise the Essence or Self is an all-embracing Possibility that excludes nothing in its utter unity. Because the Names only come into view when the Self is viewed from the perspective of multiplicity, it is possible to say that the Names are present in a state of potentiality when the Self is considered in Itself and in Its oneness. It does not mean that the Essence is a kind of matter from which the forms of the Names are then actualized.

[377] That is, Sahl al-Tustari.

[378] See Ringstone of Abraham, p.***.

[379] Once again commenting on a common theme, Ibn al-'Arabi is saying that the lord (*rabb*) needs to have something over which it is lord (*marbub*) in order to be a lord. The identity of a thing is here considered as the *marbub*, and the *rabb* is the Name of God which corresponds to that identity. Without the identity there would be no relationship of lordship, and hence no lord. Lordship is not annulled because the identities do not in fact disappear, and they can only subsist as what they are by virtue of the Names which are their lords.

[380] "…its lord in it" meaning the identity's lord in the identity.

[381] Ibn al-'Arabi is using the language of good-pleasure or satisfaction (*rida*) to discuss the relationship between lord and identity. The lord or specific Name determines what the identity is, and the identity comprises what the actions of the existent will be. Because the existent is a manifestation of the identity, and hence of the Name, it allows the relationship lord-subject (*rabb-marbub*) to be sustained, and so is well-pleasing by virtue of balancing this relationship. This evokes the theme often encountered in Ibn al-'Arabi of the Divine Names and Qualities 'yearning' for their manifestation, and asking the all-embracing Name to bring it about. Because this yearning is satisfied by the existent the lord, which is the determining principle of its existence, is well-pleased with it. The acts of the identity belong to the lord in the sense that it is a self-disclosure of God in a specific way, this specific aspect being none other than the 'lord' whose acts manifest in the identity. The anthropomorphic language of

everything its creation, then guideth.[382] That is, He made it clear that He gives everything its creation, and so it allows neither of decrease nor of increase.[383] Ishmael, in coming to know what we have spoken of, was well-pleasing to his Lord. It is thus that every existent is well-pleasing to its lord.

Although every existent is well-pleasing to its lord, as we have explained, it does not then become necessary that it should be well-pleasing to the lord of some other slave, for indeed it receives lordship from the totality, not from the one. Out of this totality, only that to which it corresponds is specified for it; it is its lord.[384] None receive it by virtue of His unity. For this reason the Folk of God have denied self-disclosure in unity.[385] If you contemplate Him in Him, it is He who contemplates Himself. He is ever contemplating Himself in Himself. If you contemplate Him in yourself, through you unity will disappear. If you contemplate Him in Him as well as in yourself, unity will likewise disappear. This is so because the pronoun "you" in "you contemplate" is not identical with the object of contemplation. There must exist some relationship necessitating the two realities of "contemplator" and "contemplated". Thus unity disappears, even though naught was seen but Himself in Himself. It is known that in this depiction[386] He is both contemplator and contemplated. It is inadmissible for every well-pleasing thing to be well-pleasing in an unqualified way, except when it possesses all the acts, which manifest through it, of Him who is well-pleased.[387]

Ishmael had superiority over other identities by virtue of the Real's describing him as being well-pleasing to his Lord. Likewise, it is said to every tranquil soul, *Return unto thy Lord*.[388] It is commanded only to return to its lord who called it, knowing this lord from out of the totality, *well-pleased and well-pleasing*. *Enter ye among my slaves*, which they are by virtue of their possessing this station. The slaves

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good-pleasure is of course symbolic or 'mythical' in the same way that the language of yearning is when it comes to the doctrine of the Names.

[382] 20:50

[383] This is a reference to the immutability of the identities, whose preparedness for what they receive is determined by the Names which function as their lords.

[384] In its own way this point explains the existence of good and evil in the world. The idea that all things are well-pleasing to their lords exemplifies the perspective that, from God's standpoint, there is no evil. This is the point of view that sees everything in its unmediated relationship with God. It is when we pass from this 'vertical' or 'radial' way of looking at things and view them horizontally or along the circumference that the hierarchy and interrelationality of the Names allows for the manifestation of opposition and contrariety and hence of evil. In Unity there is no question of evil because there is no possibility of one thing being displeasing to another, since "it does not allows of partitioning".

[385] It should be recalled that "unity" translates *ahadiyyah*, which refers to the unity of the God the Self, as opposed to "oneness" (*wahidiyyah*) which refers to the God as the Divine Names and Qualities. The latter is the first "self-identification" (*ta'ayyun*) of the Essence or Self.

[386] Referring to the language of contemplation (*nazrah*), contemplator (*nazir*), and contemplated (*manzur*).

[387] This is a reference to the identity of Perfect Man, which manifests all the Names and Qualities and hence is unique in being well-pleasing to the Lord of lords (*rabb al-arbab*).

mentioned here are all those slaves who know their lord and restrict themselves to that lord. None look to the lord of another, although the Identity is a unity; this must be so. *Enter my Garden*, which is My veil.[389] "My Garden is naught else but thee, and thou veilest Me with thine own essence. I am known only through thee, just as thou *art* only through Me. Whosoever knoweth thee, knoweth Me, but I am not known and so thou art not known." When you enter His Garden, you enter yourself and know yourself with a knowledge other than the knowledge you had when you knew your lord through your knowledge of it.[390] You thus possess two kinds of knowledge. Knowledge of Him by virtue of you, and knowledge through Him of you by virtue of Him, not by virtue of you.[391]

Thou art slave and thou art the lord
Of whom thou art slave
And thou art lord and thou art the slave
Of Him who hath a promise in His address[392]
Each belief an individual has
Is undone by another belief outside of it[393]

God is well-pleased with His slaves, for they are well-pleasing. And they are well-pleased with Him, for He is well-pleasing. The two presences[394] face each other in the manner of likenesses. Now, likenesses are contraries, because the two likenesses cannot be unified, lest they become indistinguishable. There is only what

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[388] 87:27-29

[389] *al-Jannah* or the Garden (or Paradise) comes from a root meaning to cover, referring to land covered by trees.

[390] That is, your soul.

[391] Each soul only returns to its own specific lord because it is in reality only returning to its own truest self, its very own identity. This identity has as its lord that specific Name that determines what it is. It is through attaining to his own selfhood that man achieves Paradise. God is known in the measure that man is known, but just as the Self cannot be made an object of knowledge so too is the selfhood of man not knowable. As a self-disclosure of the Supreme Self man's selfhood is the impenetrable mystery (*sirr*) that is known only to God. The first kind of knowledge mentioned may described as a negative way of knowing, since we know the lord through ourselves by knowing what we are not and by knowing the ways in which we are needful of Him. The second kind of knowledge may described as a positive way of knowing, where we know what we are by knowing, through God, what God is. When we know God through God we know ourselves as self-disclosures of God and know that everything we are derives from Him in a positive way.

[392] Referring to 7:172, the primordial covenant between God and man, '*Am I not your Lord?'* (*Alastu bi Rabbikum?*) *They said, 'Yes, we testify'—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this.'*

[393] The idea that each individual has his own specific lord is related to the 'divinity of beliefs' which Ibn al-'Arabi will discuss at greater length later in the Ringstone of Hud. Beliefs are diverse, and some are mutually contradictory and deny one another's validity by virtue of the fact that individuals have different 'lords'.

[394] Referring to the presence of lordship and the presence of slavehood.

distinguishes, and there is no likeness.[395] There is no likeness in existence, and there is no contrariness in existence. Existence is a single reality, and a thing is never the contrary of itself.

Naught remaineth but the Real, no being remaineth
There is no destination, and there is no separation
This is what vision's proof sayeth, so I see naught
With my eyes but Himself when I see

That is for him who fears his Lord,[396] that is, that he should *be* Him, due to his knowledge of the distinction. Now, this is indicated to us by people's ignorance of what men of knowledge say concerning existence, so distinction occurs among slaves, and distinction occurs among lords.[397] If the distinction did not occur, then a single Divine Name could be explained, in all respects, by what explains another. The Giver of Glory cannot be explained as the Abaser is explained, and so forth. Yet, it is He from the standpoint of Unity, just as you say of every Name that it is an indication of the Essence and of His Reality as such. The Named is one. The Giver of Glory is the Abaser by virtue of the Named, but the Giver of Glory is not the Abaser by virtue of itself and its reality, for indeed the concept differs for each of them in our understanding.

Do not look to the Real
While divesting Him of creation
And do not look to creation
Clothing it with aught but the Real
Make Him incomparable and make Him similar
And reside in the seat of sincerity
Be thou in union, if thou wishest
Or, if thou wishest, in distinction
Through both obtain a great success,
If both appear to thee
Do not perish, nor abide

[395] Again Ibn al-'Arabi shifts perspectives in the middle of a sentence. We may view reality from the point of view of essences, seeing things in terms of what they are and are not, but we may also view it as the single existence which allows of no likeness. Likeness would imply two entities that resemble one another, introducing multiplicity in the same way contrariety would.
[396] 87:29, which is preceded by, *God is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him…*
[397] The "this" at the beginning of the sentence signifies the distinction mentioned in the previous sentence. Some men are ignorant of the two perspectives of distinction and unity, while the true men of knowledge know it and speak of it. They are arrayed in a hierarchy of knowledge, and this hierarchy is itself a result of the hierarchy and distinction among their lords, i.e., the Names which govern their existence.

Nor cause to perish, nor cause to abide
Revelation is not given thee
From another, and neither dost thou so give

Praise comes from faithfulness to the promise, not faithfulness to the threat. The glorified Divine Presence demands praise in Itself. One praises It in Its faithfulness to the promise, not in Its faithfulness to the threat; indeed one does so in its being passed over. *Think not that God shall break His promise to His Messengers*.[398] He did not say, "…and His threat." Rather, he said, *He shall pass over their sins*,[399] although He had delivered a threat about them. He praised Ishmael because he was true to his promise. The possibility disappears when it comes to the Real, since it requires a preponderating factor.[400]

Naught remaineth but the One, true to His promise
The threat of the Real hath no identity to be seen
Though they enter the abode of suffering, they
Have pleasure therein and clear enjoyment
The enjoyment of eternal gardens, the reality is one
Difference arises between them upon self-disclosure
It is called punishment because of the sweetness of its food
It is to it as a husk, and the husk protecteth[401]

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[398] 14:47
[399] 46:16
[400] The words for promise (*wa'd*) and threat (*wa'id*) are nearly the same word. Sin is the preponderating factor necessary for the possibility between promise and threat to go towards the threat, but as mentioned above, *He shall pass over their sins*, and so only the promise remains.
[401] "Punishment" and "sweetness" both come from the root '-dh-b. One interpretation of this last verse is that the punishment is a husk for the sweetness within, which is to say that what seems outwardly to be suffering is inwardly not so. The nature and duration of the punishments of Hell are a controversial point in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi. I have chosen to quote a good part of Qaysari's lengthy comments on this poem:

Know that the universal and all-embracing stations of the Hereafter for all slaves [of God] are three, although each of these comprises a great many innumerable levels. They are Paradise, Hell, and the Battlements which lie between the other two as is spoken of in the Divine Speech. Each of them has a Name which determines/governs it and demands in its essence the people of that station, because they are its charge and they form the structure of that domain. His promise includes all of them, since His promise refers to the attainment by every one of us of the perfection specified for him in eternity. Just as Paradise is promised, so too are Hell and the Battlements promised.

The threat also includes all, for indeed the people of Paradise enter Paradise with an attractor (*jadhib*) and a driver. God sayeth, *And every soul shall come, and with it a driver and a witness* (50:21). The attractor is the affinity (*munasabah*) between them through the intermediation of the prophets and saints. The driver is the All-Merciful, through His threat and trials by various kinds of afflictions and tribulations. Similarly, that which attracts to Hell is the affinity between these two things and its people. The driver is Satan. It is none other than the Fire which is promised them; it is not threatened against them.

The threat is the punishment associated with the Name the Avenger. Its determination manifests in five groups, and in no others, because the people of Hell are either polytheists, disbelievers,

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Spirit in the Word of Jacob

Religion is two religions. There is religion in the sight of God and in the sight of those taught by the Real most high, and of those taught by those who have been taught by the Real. Then there is the religion in the sight of creatures, which is acknowledged by God. The religion in the sight of God is the one He chose and to which He granted an exalted station over the religion of creatures. He, most high, said, *Abraham entrusted it to his family, as did Jacob, "O my family, God hath chosen thee thy religion, so die not except in a state of surrender."*[402] That is, die not except in a state of obedience to Him. "Religion" occurs with "the" for reasons of

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hypocrites, or disobedient believers, who are divided into the imperfect people who know and who affirm unity and those who are veiled. When the authority of the Exactor of Vengeance is brought to bear upon them they suffer the infernos of the Fire. Recall that God sayeth, [*A fire,*] *whose pavilion encompasses them, and, And they shall call, 'O Malik, let thy Lord have done with us!' He will say, 'You will surely tarry.', and, The chastisement shall not be lightened for them; no respite shall be given them, and, Be gone therein, and speak not to* Me.

When the years and ages pass for them, and they remember fire and forget the pleasure of contentment, they will say, 'Alike it is for us whether we cannot endure, or whether we are patient; we have no asylum.' Then will mercy attach itself to them, and suffering shall be lifted from them. Still, in relation to the knowing person who entered therein because of the deeds that correspond to it, the suffering is enjoyment in one aspect, although it is suffering from another aspect. Recall that it is said,

Your suffering is enjoyment, and your anger is contentment
Your severance is joining, and your tyranny is justice

This is so because he witnesses the punished person in his punishment, and the punishment becomes an occasion to witness the Real, which is the most pleasure that is possible for him. For the veiled people, who are mindless of the true Essence, there is also pleasure in one aspect, as is spoken of in the tradition, "Some people of Hell will play with the fire." Now, playing is inseparable from enjoyment, although such a one is punished by his lack of awareness of that in which he believes, namely the Paradise of deeds which consists of houris and palaces. In relation to those people whose preparedness requires being far from the Real and being close to the Fire, and this is the meaning of Hell, it is also pleasure though in reality it is suffering…

In relation to the hypocrites who have a preparedness for perfection and a preparedness for deficiency it is punishment because they perceive perfection while being unable to attain it, but since their preparedness for deficiency overcomes they become well-pleased with their deficiencies and cease to suffer after the Avenger has taken vengeance on them, and the suffering becomes pleasure. It is akin to what we might see in someone who does not desire some base thing at first, and who then, after it happens to him and he is afflicted by it and it repeatedly originates from him he grows accustomed to it and forgets, and then proceeds to boast of it after having hated it.

In relation to the polytheists who worship other existents beside God, the Avenger takes vengeance upon them because they limited God to what they worshipped, and made the Absolute Divinity qualified. Insofar as their object of worship was identical with the Being of the Real, who manifested in that form, they were not worshipping other than God and God is well pleased with them in that respect, and their punishment becomes pleasure for them.

[402] 2:132

definitude and familiarity.[403] It is a religion well-known and familiar, spoken of in His Words, *Verily in the sight of God the religion is Islam*, which means obedience. Religion[404] is a reference to your obedience. What comes from God most high, is the Law to which you are obedient. Now, religion is obedience, and the rules consist of the Law that God most high has prescribed for you. Whosoever can be described as being obedient to what God has prescribed for him practices religion and institutes it as well, which is to say that he 'sets it up' just as he institutes Prayer.[405] Thus the slave sets up religion, while the Real is He who lays down its rulings. Obedience is your very act, and so religion comes from your acts. You experience happiness only through what comes from you. Just as your acts establish happiness for you, so too do His Acts—which are yourself and things that come to be—establish the Divine Names. Through His effects He is called Divinity, and through your effects you are called happy.[406] God likens you to Himself when you institute religion and obey what He has prescribed for you. This shall be expanded upon, if God so wills, through that wherein is to be found benefit, after we have explained religion in the sight of creatures, which is acknowledged by God.

All of religion is God's, but all of it comes from you, not from Him—although this is not so at root.[407] God most high says, *They began monasticism*[408]—referring to the rules of wisdom which were not brought by the recognized Messenger from God to the generality—by means of the special path which is known by tradition.[409] When their wisdom and outward concerns are in agreement with the divine command, as regards the purpose of the establishment of divine law, God acknowledges it as He would the prescriptions that come from Him. God did not prescribe it for them. God, having opened a gate of mercy and solicitude between Himself and their hearts of which they were unaware, placed into their hearts a magnification of what they

[403] That is, to promote it to the status of a definite noun. This is a reference to *Verily in the sight of God the religion is Islam* (3:19). This refers to the religion in the first sense mentioned above, which is revealed directly by God.

[404] *Din* (religion) comes from a verb which can also mean to owe, to have power over, or to be obedient to. As will be seen later in the chapter, it can also carry a meaning of habit or custom.

[405] The Quran often commands the believers not only to pray (*sallu*) but also to 'raise up' the Prayer (*aqimu'l-salah*), implying something that is made a rule and an institution.

[406] Divine Names such as the Creator or the Giver demand the existence of the created and the recipient, as has been discussed so many times already in this book. Religion (*din*) requires the existence of a responsible subject as well as the acts that he commits or omits, which in turn lead to happiness or to misery. Man achieves happiness through his activity, just as God achieves Creator-ness and Giver-ness through the world ("you and things which come to be"). Man's happiness comes from the effects of his activity, and God's divinity (that is, being divine in relation to the world which is not divine) comes from His effects, which are none other than the things of the world.

[407] "At root" meaning that the ultimate source of all actions is God.

[408] 57:27

[409] "…by means of…" follows from, "They began monasticism," meaning that they started this practice through establishing the special path. Qashani gives the example of Sufism within Islam as an example of a set of rules and practice which were not brought by the Prophet in their later form, and here Ibn al-'Arabi is making the point that the rules of monasticism came about in the same way.

prescribed—by which they seek the good-pleasure of God—in a way other than the way of prophethood, which is known by being made known divinely.[410] *They did not observe it*, those who prescribed it and for whom it was prescribed,[411] *as it should be observed except seeking the good-pleasure of God*,[412] and such was what they believed. *We gave those of them who believed,* that is, who believed in it, *their recompense*. *And many of them*, that is, those for whom this worship was prescribed, *are corrupt*. That is to say, they fall outside of obedience to it and of giving it its due. The person who does not act in obedience to it shall not be obeyed by its prescriber regarding what pleases him.[413]

Now, the reality of things demands obedience. We explain this by saying that the person charged with responsibility[414] is either obedient through his compliance or is a transgressor. Now, as for the obedient one acting in compliance, there is nothing to be said concerning this, as it is obvious. As for the transgressor, he is asking God—through his transgression which exercises control over him—for one of two things: either for a passing over and pardon, or to be held accountable for it. It must be one of these two, because there is a right owed by his soul. Whatever be the case, it holds true that the Real obeys His slave, due to his acts and the state he undergoes. It is the state which affects.[415]

And thus it is that religion is recompense, that is, it is a requital with what brings

[410] A prophet is made known and establishes religion partly on the basis of *mu'jizat*, usually translated as "miracles" but which literally means "that which makes one unable", i.e., unable to deny the divine origin of the phenomenon. Rather than establishing the validity of the inward path through these outward signs, God acts through the hearts of those who would practice this inward path and makes it known to them from within themselves that this path should be followed. Both ways or paths are acknowledged by God.

[411] Those who prescribed the rules are the spiritual masters, while those for whom it is prescribed are their disciples or those masters who follow the rule of a previous master.

[412] The more apparent reading of the Arabic gives us, *And monasticism they invented—We did not prescribe it for them—only seeking the good pleasure of God; but they observed it as it should not be observed. So We gave those of them who believed their wage, and many of them are corrupt*. (modified Arberry) Ibn al-'Arabi reads it to mean that they only observed it in seeking the good pleasure of God, which is allowable in the Arabic though it requires reversing the usual word order for such a construction.

[413] Among those who would follow this inward path there are those who are true to its rules and teachings while others fail to carry out their obligations on the path and even behave or believe in opposition to it. To behave disobediently to it denies a person the reward of one who fulfills the obligations of this path, precisely because it is acknowledged by God.

[414] *Mukallaf*, referring to a human being who is adult, sane, and healthy, and hence legally and religiously answerable for his actions.

[415] The creature's state of disobedience produces the effect because this state calls forth certain entailments. From one point of view the disobedience is an expression of one's immutable identity, and God 'obeys' the creature by granting existence to the entailments of the disobedience, which are none other than an aspect of the immutable identity itself. From another angle of vision the punishment is the effect of a person who knowingly commits an act of disobedience, and who merits and even requires this punishment owing to the bad intention within his soul. These two perspectives do not cancel one another, but express the same reality viewed both from the temporal point of view and the eternal point of view. This is discussed further by Ibn al-'Arabi below when he speaks of the mystery and inward meaning of recompense.

happiness and with what does not. Regarding what brings happiness, He says, *God is well-pleased with them and they with Him*.[416] This is a recompense with something that brings happiness. *And We shall have the oppressors among them taste a great chastisement*,[417] refers to the recompense that does not bring happiness. As for, *And We shall pass over their sins*,[418] this is a recompense. And so it holds true that religion is precisely recompense. Now religion is precisely surrender,[419] and surrender is identical with submission. Thus one yields to what brings happiness and to what does not; this is recompense. This is language dealing with the plain sense of this subject.

As for its[420] mystery and its inward aspect: it is a self-disclosure in the mirror of the Real's existence. Nothing is granted by God to contingent things except what is granted by their essences in their states. They have a form in every state, and their forms differ due to the diversity of their states. Therefore the self-disclosure differs, due to the difference of the state. The effect occurs in the slave in accordance with *what he is*.[421] Nothing other than himself grants him any benefit, and no one else grants him benefit's opposite. Indeed, it is he who bestows upon his own essence,

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[416] 98:8
[417] 25:19
[418] 46:16
[419] *al-Islam*, which literally means "surrender" and is also the proper name of the religion of Muhammad.
[420] That is, the mystery of recompense.
[421] The word translated as "state" here is *hal*, which also means "case", "condition", and the state of occurring at the present moment. In metaphysical Arabic *hal* can sometimes carry a broader and more technical sense. In a general way, one can say that it refers to a mode of relationality, to the way in which a particular reality occupies its place in the order of things. For example, some of the chapter headings in Mulla Sadra's works read, *Fi ahwal* (pl. of *hal*) *al-mahiyyah*, which literally translated would read, "Concerning the states of quiddity." It signifies that the chapter in question will discuss the various ways in which quiddity relates to other concepts, as well as the changes it undergoes, as a concept, depending upon the angle of vision we choose to study it. It does not mean that quiddity has states in the sense of possessing changing characteristics over the course of time.

The following excerpt from the *Futuhat* sheds light on this question,

"So God possesses the Necessity of Immutability and Being, while this entity possesses the necessity of immutability. The states are to this entity as the divine names are to the Real. Just as the names of the One Entity [of Being] do not pluralize or multiply the Named, so also the states do not pluralize or multiply this entity, even though manyness and number are intelligible within the names and the states…

"There is also another distinction, which is that the Real undergoes fluctuation in states, but states do not make him undergo fluctuation, since it is impossible that a state should exercise a property over God. Rather, He exercises a property over it. Hence He undergoes fluctuation in them, but they do not make Him undergo fluctuation. "Each day He is upon some task" (55:29), for if they made him undergo fluctuation, they would impose upon him properties." *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 183.

The identity itself is immutable and cannot in itself undergo change, since by definition it is beyond temporal fluctuation and hence beyond change. Recalling that Ibn al-'Arabi says that, "He undergoes fluctuation in them, but they do not make him undergo fluctuation," we can also say that the immutable identity undergoes or possesses states when it enters into the created order of space and time. These states do not have a determining effect over the immutable identity, but are rather owned by it and manifest from it. It is in this way in which one can speak of the states that an immutable identity has or undergoes.

and punishes it as well. Let him lay blame on none other than himself, and let him praise none other than himself. *God's is the most convincing argument*,[422] regarding His knowledge of them, since knowledge depends on the known thing.

The mystery that lies beyond this, on this question, is that contingent things in their principle come from non-existence.[423] There is no existence other than the existence of the Real in the forms of the states of what contingent things *are* in themselves and in their identities. You have come to know him who savors and him who suffers, as well as what it is that 'follows' upon every state, by which it[424] is referred to as penalty and punishment.[425] This applies for both good and evil, except that tradition has come to call it 'reward' as it concerns good, and 'punishment' as it concerns evil.

This is why religion can be called, or can be explained as being, recurrence, since what is required by one's state comes back to that person. Thus is religion recurrence. A poet says,

As was your din *(religion) with Umm Huwayrith before her.*

That is to say, your 'habit'.[426] What is understood by recurrence is that something returns to its state exactly as it was. That is not what we have here, for indeed, recurrence is repetition.[427] However, recurrence is an intelligible reality, and resemblance between forms does exist. We know that Zayd is identical with 'Amr in terms of 'being-a-man', but 'being-a-man' does not recur. If it were to recur it would be multiple. It is a single reality, and a single thing does not become multiple in itself. We also know that Zayd is not 'Amr in terms of individuality. Thus the individual "Zayd" is not the individual "'Amr", although one realizes the existence of individuality as such in these two. As it concerns the sensorial realm we say that it recurs due to this resemblance, but with sound judgement we say that it does not recur. From one point of view there is no recurrence, and from another point of view there is, just as there is recompense from one point of view and there is no recompense from another, for indeed recompense is also a state, in the contingent, among the states of the contingent. The men of knowledge in this affair have been

[422] 6:149

[423] Here non-existence (*'adam*) refers to the state of non-manifestation, not to non-existence in an unqualified sense, which would be purely and simply nothing (*la shay'*).

[424] That is, the state.

[425] The verb translated as "follows" (*'aqaba*) in this sentence shares the same trilateral root as the word for "penalty" (*'uqubah*) and "punishment" (*'iqab*). The root has the meaning of that which ensues or comes after.

[426] *'Adah* means both "habit" as well as the coming back or recurrence of something. The quotation of the verse is meant to show how *din*, which is usually translated as "religion", can be used to mean *'adah*, which is usually translated as "habit", "return", or "recurrence".

[427] That is to say, in religion or recompense the *'adah* is not a repetition, but a state which 'comes back' to a person as a result of a previous state.

neglectful of this issue. That is to say, they have neglected to explain it as it ought to be explained. It is not that they are not ignorant of it, for indeed it is a part of the mystery of the ordainment governing created things.

Know that just as it is said of a physician that he is in service of nature, so too is it said of the Messengers and the Heirs that they are in service of the Divine Command among the generality. But in reality they are in service of the states of contingent things. Their service is part of the totality of their states, which they undergo in the state of their identities' immutability. Contemplate how wondrous this is! The renderer of the service we seek for *here* stops at the visible appearance of the one being served, either by his state or by his words.[428] One can only correctly say of a physician that he is in service of nature if his approach is to support it, for nature gives the body of the ill person a specific temperament[429] by virtue of which he is referred to as being ill. If the physician were to give aid to *this* in his service he would increase the amount of sickness as well. All that happens is that, in seeking health, he curbs it—and health comes from nature as well—by producing another temperament, which will differ from that temperament. Therefore, the physician is not in service of nature, yet it is only to it that he renders service, by virtue of the fact that the body of the ill person cannot become healthy, nor can that temperament change, except through nature. So in its regard he exerts effort in one specific respect, not as a universal application, for a universal approach would not be correct in this sort of matter. Therefore the physician gives service and does not give service—that is, to nature.[430]

Likewise are the Messengers and the Heirs in the service of the Real. The Real has two aspects in determining the states of those charged with responsibility. The affair proceeds from the slave in accordance with what is required by the Will of the Real. The will of the Real is attached to him in accordance with what is required by the Real's knowledge, and the Real's knowledge is attached to him in accordance with what is accorded by the known thing from its essence. It only becomes manifest in its form. Thus the Messenger and the Heir are in service of the divine command through the will, but they are not in service of the will. They oppose it *with* it in seeking happiness for the one burdened with responsibility. Had they been in the service of the will they would not have given admonition, and yet they only give

[428] Referring to the relationship of the physician to the patient.

[429] The *mizaj* of a person is the balance of his physical or psychological makeup, often referring to the balance of his four bodily humors.

[430] Physical health in traditional Islamic medicine depends in part on a proper equilibrium between the various qualities of the physical makeup, whether it be the economy between the bodily humors or the balance between cold, hot, moist, and dry. Sickness arises as a result of an imbalance in one's nature, and thus the physician must selectively treat that specific tendency from out of the totality natural states. If he were to reinforce one's nature so as to give all aspects the same attention, the imbalance would remain. By giving to or taking away from certain aspects of nature he renders service to the whole of one's bodily nature.

admonition through the will. The Messenger and the Heir are the physicians of the Hereafter for souls. They are obedient to the command of God when He commands. They contemplate His command, and contemplate His will, transcendent is He, and see him as having commanded something which contradicts His will, and which is not other than what He wills, and this is why there was the command. He willed the command, so it occurred, and He did not will the occurrence of what He commanded for one who was commanded, and so it did not occur in this one who was commanded; this is referred to as defiance and disobedience. The Messenger is a conveyor of news. To this point he said, "*Hud* and its sisters have made me go gray,"[431] that is, due to what they contain of His Words such as, *So go thou straight, as thou hast been commanded*.[432] *As thou hast been commanded* "made him go gray", for he did not know if he was commanded to do what was in agreement with the will, in which case it would occur, or to do what contradicted the will, in which case it would not occur.[433] No one knows the determination of the will until after the thing that is willed has occurred except for one whose vision has been granted unveiling by God, and who thus perceives the identities of contingent things in their state of immutability *as they are*. He will judge by what he sees. This is the case for individuals among men, at times when they are not in company. He said, *I know not what shall be done with me or with you*,[434] speaking openly about the veil. He meant only that he was apprised of certain affairs and not others.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Light in the Word of Joseph

[431] The version of this tradition I found Tirmidhi's *tafsir* on 56:6 reads, "Abu Bakr said, 'O Messenger of God, you have gone gray.' He said, '*Hud*, *al-Waqi'ah*, *al-Mursalat*, *'Amma yatasa'alun*, and *Idha'l-shamsu kuwwirat* have made me go gray.'" These are the names of the 11th, 56th, 77th, 78th, 81st chapters of the Quran respectively. The verse in question is in the chapter *Hud*.

[432] The context of which is, Surely each one of them—thy Lord will pay them full for their works; He is aware of the things they do. So go thou straight, as thou hast been commanded, and whoso repents with thee; and be you not insolent; surely He sees the things you do. (11:111-112)

[433] Here Ibn al-'Arabi is discussing the two senses of will using only the word *iradah*, whereas in other cases he uses both *mashiyyah* and *iradah* together (both of which can be translated as 'will') for the sake of contrast. God's will is seen in two aspects, the existentiating command (*al-amr al-takwini*) and the enjoining command (*al-amr al-taklifi*). The existentiating command is God's will which grants existence to the immutable identities, while the enjoining command is will of God expressed as commands and prohibitions within the created order. Disobedience is the existentiation of the possibility of contradicting the will of God. This disobedience exists by virtue of God granting existence to the disobedience that is part of someone's immutable identity.

By disobeying the command of God in the Law, man is in reality fulfilling the will of God in creation, in the same way that by curbing or reinforcing only certain aspects of nature, the physician serves the greater purpose of nature. These two dimensions of the divine will do not eliminate the reality of reward and punishment, because disobedience is still disobedience from the perspective of the creature in relation to his Creator. The perspective that all things occur through the divine will can only be that of God in Himself. To say that all things are the will of God is in essence to say that all is good and there is no evil. Just as there is good and evil in the world while there is only good from the point of view of God Himself, so too is there obedience and disobedience in the world but only obedience from the point of view of God.

This Wisdom of Light is the expansion of its light over the presence of the imagination. It is the beginning of the origins of divine revelation in the sight of the Folk of providence.[435] ʻAishah, may God be pleased with her, said, "Revelation first began for the Prophet through veridical dreams. Any dream he had would come like the break of dawn."[436] She was saying that there would be no hiddenness in it. Her knowledge reached that far but no further. He was like this for a period of six months, and then the angel came to him.[437] She did not know that the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, would say, "Indeed mankind is asleep, and when they die, they awaken."[438] Everything one sees while awake is like this,[439] though the states may vary. What she spoke of lasted for six months; nay, his entire life in this lower-world passed this way, being but a sleep within a sleep. Anything one encounters is like this and is called the world of imagination, and for this reason is to be interpreted.[440] That is, the thing which in itself possesses such and such a form is manifest in the form of something else. The interpreter undertakes a passage[441] from this form the sleeper saw to the form of what it the thing is—that is, if he is correct. Take for example the manifestation of knowledge in the form of milk: in interpreting it he undertook a passage from the form of the milk to the form of knowledge. He interpreted, that is, he said that the form of milk is to be interpreted as being the form of knowledge.

When the Prophet received revelation, may God bless him and grant him peace, he would be taken from the visible, sensorial world and would be shrouded, becoming hidden from those present around him. When this withdrew he was returned. He perceived it in none other than the presence of the imagination, although

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[434] 46:9. These are words of the Prophet.

[435] The 'it' refers to the expansion of the light, meaning that revelation (*wahy*) enters into the imaginational world from the angelic world, as a spiritual reality taking on successive levels of form.

[436] Bukhari 1:3

[437] Referring to the Prophet's first encounter with Gabriel.

[438] As pointed out by Chittick, this tradition is commonly quoted but does not appear in the major collections, "Abu Ibrahim Mustamli Buhkari (d. 434/1042-43) attributes it to ʻAli ibn Abi Talib (*Sharh-i taʻarruf* [Lucknow, 1328], III, p. 98)." *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 396.

[439] According to Qashani and Qaysari, in some manuscripts "while asleep" is read instead of "while awake". The latter seems to make more sense in this context, and would mean that even our waking life is like a sleep except for the realized few.

[440] Recall that for Ibn al-ʻArabi there is imagination in the absolute sense, which encompasses everything between God and nothingness, and imagination in the relative sense, which is one mode of reality among others. Although we ordinarily try to interpret our experiences in the relative imagination, usually in dreams, Ibn al-ʻArabi is arguing in this paragraph that our waking experiences are also a kind of dream which can be interpreted. As he mentions in the following sentence, interpretation is necessary because it is in the nature of things that realities possessing certain forms manifest in different forms in different modes of reality.

[441] The word for interpretation (*taʻbir*) also carries the meaning of traversing or crossing.

he could not be called sleeper.[442] Likewise, when the angel was represented to him as a man, this came from the presence of the imagination, for indeed he was not a man but rather an angel who had entered the form of a man. This onlooker, possessed of knowledge, interpreted it in order to arrive at its true form, and thus did he say, "That was Gabriel, who came to teach you your religion."[443] He said as well, "Bring back this man," calling him "man" by reason of the form in which he was manifest to them. Furthermore he said that it was Gabriel, thus acknowledging the form he interpreted this imaginational man to be. He spoke truthfully in both utterances. He was true to his sight in seeing the sensorial identity, and was true to the fact of its being Gabriel, for there is no doubt that it was Gabriel.

Joseph said, upon him be peace, *I saw eleven stars, the sun, and the moon. I saw them prostrating to me*.[444] He saw his brothers in the form of the stars and saw his father and stepmother in the form of the sun and the moon. Now, this was from the standpoint of Joseph. If it had been from the standpoint of the objects of his vision, the manifestation of his brothers in the form of the stars and the manifestation of this father and stepmother in the form of the sun and the moon would have been something they willed. Now, since they had no knowledge of what Joseph saw, this perception of Joseph's took place in the storehouse of his imagination. Jacob knew this when it was related to him, and said, *O my son, relate not thy dream to thy brothers, lest they plot deception against thee*.[445] He then exonerated his sons from that deception and associated it with Satan, who is but identical with deception. *Indeed Satan is an open enemy of Man*, that is, he is manifest in his enmity. Afterwards, at the end of the affair, Joseph said, *This is the interpretation of my dream aforetime. God hath made it come true*.[446] That is, He manifested it in the sensorial realm after its having been present in the form of the imagination. The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Mankind is asleep." Joseph's saying, *God hath made it come true*, is like one who, while asleep, sees himself as having awakened from a dream he was having. He then interprets it, not knowing that he is still in that very sleep and has not left it. When he awakens he says, "I saw such and such and saw that I awakened and interpreted it as being such and such." It is akin to that.

Contemplate how different is the perception of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, from that of Joseph at the end of his affair, upon him be peace, in his saying, *This is the interpretation of my dream aforetime. God hath made it come true*, meaning, made it sensorial, that is to say, a sensible object. It can only be

[442] There are various accounts of the state of the Prophet when he would receive revelation. He described it as coming to him with various levels of intensity. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is alluding to the fact that when the revelation came he would withdraw from the world around him without being asleep.
[443] Muslim 1:1
[444] 12:4
[445] 12:5
[446] 12:100

sensible, for the imagination only accords sensible objects. Anything else would not be proper to it.[447] Contemplate how excellent is the knowledge of the heirs of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. We shall expand upon this saying[448] about this presence through the Muhammadan language of Joseph.[449] You will grasp it if God so wills.

We say: Know that what one calls 'other than the Real' and which is referred to as 'the world' is, in relation to the Real, as a shadow is to an object. It is the shadow of God. It is in just this way that existence is attributed to the world, for without doubt that shadow is existent in the sensory domain, albeit only when there is something wherein the shadow is manifest. Even if you could make absent that wherein the shadow is manifest, the shadow would be intelligible, though not existent in the sensory domain. Indeed, it would be there in potency in the essence of the object to which the shadow is attributed. This divine shadow's locus of manifestation, which we call the world, consists only of the identities of contingent things. This shadow extends over them, and you perceive this shadow in the measure of what extends over it—namely this Essence's existence.[450] Yet it is by virtue of His Name Light that the perception occurs. This shadow extends over the essences of contingent things in the form of the unknown invisible.[451] Do you not see how shadows incline towards

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[447] Here 'sensible' refers to the qualities of the imaginational object such as shape, color, size, and relation. Both an imaginational horse and a bodily horse have shape, size, and color, but one is a body while the other is its likeness (*mithal*) in the imagination. *God hath made it come true*, could also be rendered, *God hath made it real* (*haqq*). The 'coming true' is the actualization of a sensible reality corresponding to the imaginational reality he experienced in his vision. Ibn al-'Arabi's point is that this 'coming true' is like waking up from one dream into another.

[448] Referring to the aforementioned saying of the Prophet, "Mankind is asleep…"

[449] The very structure of the *Ringstones* expresses Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine that the spiritual heart of each prophet has its own special character, and that the heart of Muhammad encompasses them all. It is thus possible for a Muhammadan saint to take after the heart of Joseph (*'ala qalb Yusuf*). Because Joseph is so strongly associated with the interpretation of dreams in Surah XII, his sainthood is associated with the science of the imagination world. This is what Ibn al-'Arabi means by the "Muhammadan language of Joseph" (*bi lisan Yusuf al-Muhammadi*).

[450] That is to say, the Essence's being extends over the shadow which the world is.

[451] The immutable identities are the surfaces, as it were, where the shadow of God appears. Here Ibn al-'Arabi takes the forms within God's knowledge (immutable identities), His Essence, and His emanating Light, all of which are none other than God Himself, and conceives of them in terms of an object, its shadow, and the light which allows this shadow to be cast. The identities of existent things are receptacles for the emanation of existence from God, because they represent the possible manifestations of God's Names and Qualities. The shadow of an object is a manifestation of that object which is made possible by a receptive locus and a shining light. The way in which one object will cast a shadow will depend upon the nature of the surface where the shadow will appear. For example, the same object will cast a different shadow on rocky ground than it will on rippling water or a flat plane. The light of existence is universal in its emanation, but the shadows (the world) are differentiated as a function of the differentiation of the surfaces (the immutable identities) upon which the shadow is cast. Every shadow is God's shadow, because each immutable identity is none other than a surface for the one Object's shadow to appear. The analogy becomes a bit difficult because God is both the object and the source of light

Without the light, the locus remains totally in the dark, and when it is illuminated it is known by virtue of being the place where a shadow appears; it is illumined but not luminous. This is analogous

black, pointing to the hiddenness therein, which is due to the incommensurability between them and the objects of which they are shadows? Even if the object is white its shadow is cast thus. Do you not see that when the mountains grow distant from the vision of an onlooker they will appear to be black, although in themselves they may not have the color the senses perceive, and that there is no cause for this other than the distance? Also take for example the blueness of the sky. These are results of distance when it comes to non-luminous bodies in the sensory domain. Likewise, the essences of contingent things are non-luminous because there are not existent. Although they can be said to possess immutability they cannot be said to possess existence, since existence is light. Now, for luminous bodies in the sensory domain, distance accords them smallness; this is another effect of distance. Sensory perception can only perceive it as being small in size, although in itself it is larger is size and possesses greater dimensions. For example, we know by way of proofs that the sun is one-hundred and sixteen times the size of the earth, but it is perceived by sense as being the size, let us say, of a shield.[452] This is also an effect of distance.

The world is only known to the extent that the shadows are known, and the Real is unknown to the extent that the object that casts the shadow is unknown. By virtue of its being His shadow it is known, and inasmuch as one is ignorant of the form of the Object from which it extends one is ignorant of the Real. For this reason we say that the Real is known to us in one respect and unknown to us in another. *See ye not how thy Lord extendeth the shadow, and had He so willed He would have made it to stand still?*[453] That is to say, it would be there within Him in potentiality. He is saying that the Real does not disclose Himself to contingent things until the shadow is manifest, which would otherwise remain in the manner of other contingent things for whom no identity is manifest in existence.[454] *Then we placed the sun to be a guide to it*, which is His Name Light which we spoke of, and which the sensory domain bears

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to the situation of the immutable identities, which remain in the darkness of non-manifestation until God's Light shines upon them. When he says that it is by virtue of the divine light that perception occurs, Ibn al-'Arabi means to say that it is not a question of absolute being, but being insofar as it manifests and discloses itself into relative being. The "form of the unknown invisible (*al-ghayb al-majhul*)" is the realm of the immutable identities, which are unknown and invisible but give form to the light, and in so doing give rise to existent things.

[452] This is the same word for the solar disc (*turs*).

[453] 25:45-46

[454] Here "identity" (*'ayn*) refers to the concrete identity which is a thing among things in the world. It is not *'ayn* in the sense of archetypal reality. This also applies to the sentence below which reads, "[S]hadows have no identity in the absence of light," which means they have no existence in the realm of manifestation. As was mentioned in the Introduction, the immutable *'ayn* is the archetypal reality, while "in *'ayn*" (*fi'l-'ayn* or *fi'l-a'yan*) which literally means "in identity" or "among identities" refers to concrete being.

The shadow is a potentiality of an object until a light is shined on it, which is seen as a symbol of the state of the immutable identities until the light of being shines on them. Ibn al-'Arabi does not mean that there is any potentiality in God in the strict sense. Rather, his intention is to show that the immutable identities of things dwell eternally in God and would remain so if His light did not shine upon them to grant them existence.

witness to, for indeed shadows have no identity in the absence of light. *Thereafter we seize it to Ourselves, drawing it gently*. He grasped it because it was His shadow. It becomes manifest out of Him, *And to Him the whole affair shall be returned*.[455] It is He and no other. Everything we perceive consists of the existence of the Real in the identities of contingent things. With respect to the Real's Selfhood they are His existence, and with respect to the diversity of the forms they are the identities of contingent things. Just as the name 'shadow' does not disappear due to the diversity of forms, so too is it the case that the name 'the world' or 'what is other than God' does not disappear due to the diversity of forms. With respect to the unity of its being a shadow it is the Real, for He is the Unique, the One, while with respect to the multiplicity of forms it is the world.[456] Understand and realize what I have explained to you.

Now, since this matter is as we have explained it for you here, let it be said that the world is imaginary$_w$ and has no real existence. This is the meaning of imagination. That is to say, you are given to imagine that it something else that subsists on its own outside of the Real. In reality this is not so. Do you not see how, in the sensory domain, it[457] is joined to the object from which it extends, it being impossible for that connection to be severed, since it is impossible for a thing to be separated from itself? So know what your identity is, who you are, what your selfhood is, and what your relationship to the Real is, as well as that by which you are the Real and that by which you are 'the world', 'other', 'unlike', and other similar terms.[458] In this the men of knowledge are ranked in excellence: those who know, and those who know more. In relation to some particular shadow, the Real is small or large, pure or purer. It is like light in relation to a glass that veils it from an onlooker, and whose color it takes on. In reality it has no color. Yet it is in this way that you see Him, in a similitude of your reality in relation to your Lord. If you were to say that the light is green due to the greenness of the glass, you would be speaking truthfully and sensory perception would bear you witness. If you were to say that it is neither green nor any other color, in accord with what a proof might grant you, you would also be speaking truthfully, and sound intellectual reasoning would bear you witness. This light extends from the shadow which the glass itself is; it is a shadow

[455] 11:123

[456] Here Ibn al-'Arabi is again describing the same reality from the point of view of the world and the point of view of God.

[457] Referring to the shadow.

[458] To say that there is anything "other" than God is not absolutely true because all reality is God's reality. Hence, if the world is defined as that which is other than God or unlike him, then it must be the product of the imagination because there is only one true reality. Insofar as the world is affirmed as something apart from God it is imagination, as is the subject who makes such an affirmation. But insofar as the world is seen as a self-disclosure of God it possesses a degree of reality, and insofar as the subject sees himself as none other than a disclosure of the Self he possesses reality as well. It is inconceivable to have a shadow in the absence of the object which casts it; this is the very essence of what it means to be a shadow. For Ibn al-'Arabi, this is the state of the world in relation to God.

that is luminous due to its purity. Such is the case for those among us who realize the Real: in them the Real's Image is more manifest than it is in others.[459] For some among us, the Real becomes their hearing, their sight, and all their faculties and bodily members. This is known through indications in the Law, which informs us of the Truth.[460] However, this identity of the shadow is still existent, for the pronoun in "*his* hearing" and "*his* sight" reverts back to it. Other slaves are not like this. The relationship of these slaves to the Real's existence is stronger than that of other slaves.

Now since the matter is as we have established it to be, know that you are imagination, and that all the things of which you say, "This is not I," are imagination. All of existence is imagination within imagination. Being_{w}, the Real, is only God by virtue of His Essence and His Identity, not by virtue of His Names. The Names indicate two things: the first is Himself, and it[461] is the very Named. The other is that by which one Name is separate and distinguishable from another. What is the Forgiving in relation to the Manifest and the Hidden, and what is the First in relation to the Last? That by which one Name is identical with another and that by which it is not another Name has been made clear for you. By virtue of that by which one is identical with another it is the Real, and by virtue of that by which one is not another it is the imagined Real we encounter. Glorified be He for whom there is no indication other than Himself, and whose being is affirmed only through what is none other than Him. In being there is only that which unity indicates, and in imagination there is only that which multiplicity indicates. Whoever stands on the side of multiplicity will be with the world, the Divine Names, and the names of the world. Whosoever stands on the side of Unity will be with the Real with respect to His Essence, which is beyond need of the worlds.[462] That It should be beyond need of the worlds is identical with Its being beyond need of the attribution of the Names to It. This is so because Its Names, just as they indicate themselves, also indicate other named things that actualize their effects.[463] *Say: He is God, the One*,[464] which is so with respect to

[459] The glass is a shadow because it is other than the light, but it is luminous because it is clear and allows the light to pass through. Its luminosity is borrowed from the original light. Likewise, each person is a shadow in the sense that he is other than God, but he is luminous to the extent that his heart allows the light of God to shine through. In such a person God's Image (*surat al-Haqq*) is more strongly present. From one point of view the light is colored according to each type of "glass", while from another point of view there is only the one colorless Light. It is once again a question of viewing the same reality from the point of view of unity and that of multiplicity.

[460] Referring to the tradition of supererogatory works mentioned in the next sentence.

[461] That is, the first thing indicated by the Names.

[462] Supreme Essence, being, and unity stand on one side, while the Infinite Names, forms, and imagination stand on the other. In relation to the one true reality, multiplicity is real only in an imagined way. Because the Divine Names can only be conceived of in relation to the world, they are "imagined". The Divine Names have two aspects: their proper essence, which distinguishes them, and the Object that they name, which unites them.

[463] Because the Names indicate qualities, they necessarily indicate the qualities of existent things, which is what Ibn al-'Arabi is referring to when he says, "things that actualize their effects." The

Himself. *God is the Self-Sufficient*, by virtue of our dependence upon Him. *He begetteth not*, with respect to His Selfhood and us. Likewise, *and is not begotten*, and likewise*, There is naught like unto Him*. This is His description. He singled out His Essence by His Words, *God, the One*. Multiplicity is evident through the descriptions of Him which are well known to us. We beget and are begotten. We are dependent upon Him and we resemble one another. This 'One' is beyond comparability with these traits. He is beyond need of them just as He is beyond need of us. The Real has no lineage except this chapter, Purity (*al-Ikhlas*), and it descended for that reason.[465] The Unity of God, with respect to the Divine Names that require us,[466] is the Unity of multiplicity. The Unity of God with respect to His being beyond need of us and of the Names is the Unity of Identity. The Name the One is employed for both[467] of them, so know this.

God did not existentiate the shadows, giving shade to the right and to the left, except to serve as indications for you *of* you and of Him, so that you may know who you are, what your relationship is to Him, and what His relationship is to you, and so that you may know from whence or from what divine reality what is 'other than God' possesses the quality of universal needfulness as well as that of the relative needfulness based on the needfulness of some things for others, and so that you might know from whence or from what reality the Real possesses the quality of being beyond need of mankind and the worlds, and from whence or from what reality the world possesses the quality of being beyond need, that is, of being beyond the need that one part of it has for another, possessing this in an aspect that is not itself what makes it needful of some other part of it.[468]

It is certain that the world is needful, essentially, of occasions.[469] The greatest of its occasions is the occasioning of the Real, and the Real has no occasioning for which the world stands needful other than the Divine Names.[470] The world is needful

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Divine Self is beyond the attribution of qualities in the sense that it does not stand in need of such attribution to possess what is being attributed to It, and moreover such attribution implies the existence of something which makes the attribution, thus introducing multiplicity.

[464] 112:1-4

[465] Qaysari is opposed to the idea that n-s-b here should be read as *nisab* or attributions, preferring *nasab* or "description", while Qashani seems to accept *nisab* (sing. *nisbah*). I believe that *nasab* as "lineage" fits best in this context, since one of the verses of *al-Ikhlas* is, *He begetteth not and is not begotten*.

[466] Which require the world in the sense that there can be no Creator without a creation.

[467] That is, to both kinds of Unity mentioned in the previous sentences.

[468] This paragraph is a good example of the lengths to which one must go in order to translate some passages of Ibn al-'Arabi. God is absolutely beyond need, and the world as such is unqualifiedly in need of Him for its very reality. Within the world, however, some things are needful of other things while being beyond need of certain other things. The earth does not need the moon to orbit the sun, but it does need the moon for the tides. The world is a web of dependence and independence, which is what Ibn al-'Arabi means by "relative needfulness".

[469] That is to say, needfulness is part of the very essence of what it is to be the world.

[470] "The word *sabab*, singular of *asbab*, means literally 'rope' or 'cord,' and by extension is applied to connecting things or factors. Hence it also refers to a way or means of access, or to any 'means' for

of every Divine Name, from one's like in a world or the Real Itself.[471] It will be God and no other. To this point He said, *O mankind! You are needful of God, and God is Beyond Need, the Praiseworthy*.[472] It is known that we are needful of one another. Our names are the Names of God most high, since without doubt needfulness is needfulness for Him. In reality, our identities are His shadow, nothing more. He is our selfhood and not our selfhood. We have cleared the way for thee, so contemplate.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Unity in the Word of Hud

The straight path is God's[473]
Manifest and unconcealed for all
In the small and in the great is His very Self,
In the man ignorant of things, in the knower
Because of this does His mercy encompass[474]
Everything, from the meager to the grand

There is no creature that crawls, but He takes it by the forelock. Verily my Lord is on a straight path.[475] Anything that walks is on the straight path of its Lord. In this respect it is not one of *those who suffer wrath* nor one of *those who go astray.*[476] Just

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accomplishing an end. In the Islamic sciences the term came to mean 'cause,' usually in the incomplete or incidental sense that might best be translated 'occasion' or 'mediate cause'. Often a distinction was drawn between the apparent or secondary cause of a thing and the real cause, known as the Causer of Secondary Causes (*musabbib al-asbab*), i.e., God. In the sense of 'secondary causes,' especially in the plural, the term becomes a common expression in Sufi writings to refer to the causes that seem to be at work in the cosmos. Since each thing in the universe is the cause of, or occasion for, other things, *asbab* was soon a term used to refer to existent things in general, to all the phenomena, which, in the general Islamic view, could only be outward forms of unseen realities or 'noumena.' Many Sufis held that it was blameworthy to take the *asbab* or 'secondary causes' seriously, since this would mean taking one's gaze away from the Causer of Secondary Causes. But Ibn al-'Arabi reinstates the secondary causes as fundamental constituent elements of the cosmos….The secondary causes are important because they are names of God through which we come to know Him. Without them we would have no access to Him. Here one has to understand that 'secondary causes' is merely another name for existent things, creatures, or divine acts." *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 44.

[471] The "one" in "one's like" refers to anything in the world. A child needs parents in order to exist in the world, but the parents and everything else that goes into making the child are none other than divine manifestations or Qualities of God. "One's like in a world" comes from the standpoint of the world and the relative needfulness mentioned above, while "the Real Itself" comes from the perspective of unity and self-disclosure. That fact that it reads "a world" instead of "the world" signifies that interaction takes place between like things which have a possibility for interaction in a given mode of reality.

[472] 35:15

[473] *al-sirat al-mustaqim*, referring to the verse in the *Fatihah*, *Guide us along the straight path…*

[474] Referring to the Quranic verse 7:156, *And My Mercy encompasseth everything.*

[475] 11:56

[476] These are descriptions in the *Fatihah* of those who are not on the straight path. As Ibn al-'Arabi said earlier, each creature has its own lord from amongst the totality of Names. Each identity is on the

as misguidance is an accident, so too is the Divine Wrath an accident. The final end is Mercy, which encompasses everything and outstrips.[477] Everything other than the Real is a crawling creature because each is possessed of a spirit.[478] There is nothing that crawls on its own; it can only crawl by another. It crawls in a state of dependence upon Him who is on the straight path, and indeed it is a path only in its being walked upon.[479]

When creation bows to you
The Real bows to you
If the Real bows to you
Then creation may not follow[480]
Realize our words in Him
For all I say is true
There is no existent thing in being
That thou shalt shall see not able to speak[481]

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straight path of the lord that determines that identity, and so is neither astray nor the object of any anger. Recall that in the Ringstone of Ishamel Ibn al-'Arabi says that "every existent is well-pleasing to its lord," although this does not mean that "it should be well-pleasing to the lord of some other…"

[477] Ordinarily "accident" is used to translate *'arad*, but here the word used is *'arid*, which is the active participle of the verb *'aruda*, and to which corresponds the passive participle *ma'rud*. These latter three terms present a bit of a challenge to the translator, because they do not simply evoke "accident" or "coincident" but the fact of something *becoming* an accident or coincident, from the outside as it were, of some substance or essence. It is as though one took anger and <*'aruda*> it to a person. Anger is the *'arid* and the person is the *ma'rud*. Like the Greek *sumbebekos*, *'arada* carries with it the meaning of to happen or occur, and in the philosophical sense the meaning of "to happen to be" something. The man *happens to be* angry, but it is not an essential attribute of man to be angry; anger is an accident or coincident of the essence that the man is. Ibn al-'Arabi is certainly not subjecting God to this type of logic. What he has in mind is to remind us that abiding in a state of misguidance or wrath could not be the ultimate destiny of any creature. For a time, perhaps a very long time, a man happens to be misguided or the object of wrath, but the substance of all this is God's mercy. Seen in this way, error and punishment are accidents of an underlying substance of mercy, and become part of the greater end of the creature who experiences them.

[478] In the world view of Ibn al-'Arabi all things are alive in some way, because each possesses an aspect of spirit (*ruh*). By virtue of being expressions of divine names all things have a part in the divine Life.

[479] This is a commentary on *Verily my Lord is on a straight path*. An existent identity is the manifestation of its own immutable identity, which itself is a form of a divine name. The existent which walks upon the straight path is a self-disclosure of the one divine reality. Ibn al-'Arabi understands here that God not only guides creatures along the path as their Lord, but walks the path by virtue of being on the path. That is to say, He is not only at the destination, but is none other than the one who travels that path towards the destination by virtue of being described as being "on" the path. According to the author, the very essence of being "on a path" consists in moving along that path.

[480] When creation obeys you, it is really God disclosing Himself to you in the form of a creature that is obedient to you. However, when God 'obeys' someone alone, it may be that he will be denied in what he claims to have been given by God. In reference to this verse Qaysari quotes the following Quranic passages, *I answer the call of the caller when he calls me* (2:186), and, *Call upon Me, I shall answer you* (*al-Ghafir*, 60), as well as the Divine Saying, "Whoever obeys Me shall be obeyed by Me. Whoever disobeys Me shall be disobeyed by Me."

There is no creature whose identity thou shalt see
Whose identity is not the Real
Yet He is lodged within it
Because of this are His forms containers

Know that the divine sciences of taste attained by the Folk of God are diverse, in virtue of the diversity of the faculties actualized in them, although all come from a single identity, for indeed God says, "I will be his hearing by which he heareth, his sight by which he seeth, his hand by which he graspeth, and his foot by which he steppeth."[482] He thus recalled that His Selfhood is identical with those bodily parts, which themselves are identical with the slave. The selfhood is one, while the bodily parts are diverse. There is a knowledge by taste proper to each bodily part, which specifies it in relation to the one source; they are diverse in accord with the diversity of the bodily parts.[483] For example, water is a single reality that differs in flavor when the location changes. There is the pleasant and sweet as well as the salty and bitter. It is water in all of these states, and does not change its reality even though its flavor is different.

This wisdom[484] is part of the knowledge of "the feet", spoken of in His Words, transcendent is He, concerning the food of those who institute their Books, *And what was beneath their feet*.[485] The way that is the straight path is for being traveled and walked on, and one takes steps only with one's feet. Witnessing the forelocks being seized[486] by Him who is on the straight path can only result from this special variety of the knowledge by taste.[487] *And drive the evildoers*,[488] referring to those who are deserving of the station to which the hinder wind[489] drives them, and by which He

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[481] *Nutq*, which is often translated as "reason" in the sense of the faculty of reason. Ordinarily it is seen as that power in man's soul which sets him apart from the other animals. No doubt Ibn al-'Arabi has in mind a less philosophical meaning, as found many times in the Quran, such as, *Nothing is, that does not proclaim His praise, but you do not understand their extolling* (17:44).

[482] Cf. …

[483] The sensorial faculties derive from spiritual faculties, which can be thought of as dimensions of the inner heart. These heart faculties have their manifestation in the faculties of the body. Thus sight, hearing, and all the other bodily powers come from higher powers within the soul. The soul is one, but its powers are diverse and the faculties of the creature are ranged in a vertical hierarchy. By "knowledge by taste" what is meant is a direct experience of reality, whatever the level.

[484] Referring to the wisdom of unity (*ahadiyyah*) which titles this chapter.

[485] 5:66, Speaking of the Jews and Christians, *Had they performed the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have eaten both what was above them, and what was beneath their feet*.

[486] Referring to, *No indeed; surely, if he gives not over, We shall seize him by the forelock, a lying, sinful forelock*. (96:15-16) More generally, God's grasping of the forelock symbolizes the power of God over man.

[487] Apparently, the knowledge spoken of is that of "the feet", and the vision of God's seizing man's forelock—which would take place only upon the straight path, this seizing itself being what draws man along the path—is possible only after one has "walked" the path.

[488] 19:86 The continuation of this verse is *…to Hell.*

[489] *Rih al-dubur*, which refers to a wind that comes from an unfavorable direction and hence brings

makes them to perish away from their souls. He takes them by their forelocks and the wind—which is nothing other than the desires they once had—drives them to Hell, which is the 'distance' of which they used to have imaginings$_w$. When they are driven to this domain they attain to none other than closeness. Thus distance vanishes, as does the bearer of the name 'Hell' in their regard. They enjoy the blessing of closeness from the standpoint of deservedness, for they are wrong-doers. He does not grant them this pleasurable station of tasting as a gift; they take it by means of what their realities deserve, namely from the acts they were wont to perform. In these acts they were taking steps on the straight path of their Lord, for their forelocks were in the Hand of Him to whom this description belongs. They did not walk by themselves, but walked under compulsion to arrive at none other than closeness.[490]

And We are nigher him than you, but you do not see Us.[491] Only he sees, for he has been unveiled of the covering. *Sharp is his sight.*[492] No dead man is distinguished from another, that is to say, the happy man is not distinguished from the miserable one in terms of his closeness. *We are nearer to him than the jugular vein*;[493] no man is distinguished from another. There is no concealment in the Divine sayings regarding the Divine closeness to the slave. There is no closeness greater than His Selfhood being the very bodily parts and faculties of the slave. The slave is none other than these bodily parts and faculties. It is the Real witnessed in an imagined$_w$ creature. In the eyes of the believers and the Folk of unveiling and existence, creation is intelligible while the Real is sensible. As for those falling outside of these two classes, in their eyes the Real is intelligible and creation witnessed. They are like the salty, bitter water, while those of the first group are like the pleasant, sweet water that is fit to drink.[494]

Mankind consists of two groups. Among mankind are those who walk upon a path, knowing it and knowing its final end; for them it is a straight path. And among

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harm with it.

[490] Their journey to Hell is an expression of their immutable identity. By arriving there they are close to their Lord, but in their case, at least temporarily, their Lord is the Punisher. The nature of their own souls demands that when they reach this stage their experience of God will be that of suffering. There is no use in asking why they cannot simply experience God as pure bliss instead of having to suffer the chastisements of Hell; in life their souls formed themselves such that when they pass into the next world they can only experience God painfully. They eventually find their way out of Hell, but only after what may seem like an interminable period. Recall that although Ibn al-'Arabi believes that the final end of all things is Love, he does not pass over the sinner's punishment, for, "There is a right owed by his soul." (Ringstone of Jacob)

[491] 56:85, referring here to a man on the verge of death.

[492] 50:22

[493] 50:16

[494] Here "intelligible" and "sensible" are really referring to abstract and concrete. For the believers and the realized, God is not simply an idea but a concrete reality. For them, it is the very notion of a reality apart from God that is an abstraction. But there are those who view creation as real and in whose minds God is never more than a notion with no real presence.

mankind are those who walk upon a path in ignorance of it and in ignorance of its final end, yet it is the same path the other class of people know.[495] The knower calls upon God *with discernment*.[496] He who is not a knower calls upon God through imitation and ignorance. This is a special kind of knowledge, which comes from the *lowest of the low*,[497] for the feet are the lowest part of an individual. What is below them is lower still, and which is none other than the path. Whosoever knows that the Real is identical with the path knows the affair *as it is*. It is within Him, majestic and exalted is He, that you sojourn and travel, since there is nothing known that is not He. He is identical with existence, the sojourner, and the traveler. There is no knower but He, so who are you? Therefore know your reality and your road. The matter has been made clear to you on the tongue of the Interpreter,[498] if you have understood. He is the tongue of the Real, and only one whose understanding is true shall understand him.

The Real has many attributions and diverse aspects. Do you not see how ʻAd, the people of Hud, said, *"This is a cloud, that shall give us rain!"*[499] They thought well of God most high, and He is for His slave as he thinks of Him. The Real turned them away from those words, informing them of something more complete and more exalted in terms of closeness.[500] When He gave them rain, it was an allotment for the earth and for the watering of the crops; they only attained the product of that rain from a distance.[501] He said to them, *Not so; rather it is that you sought to hasten—a wind, wherein is a painful chastisement*.[502] He made the "wind" an indication of the comfort therein.[503] By this wind He relieved them of those darkened temples, rugged paths, and veils of pitch. There was punishment[504] in that wind, that is, a thing which they would find to be sweet after having tasted it, though it would hurt them by separating them from what was familiar. He carried out the punishment, and this thing was closer to them than what they had imagined, and so *everything was destroyed by the Command of their Lord*, and, *as morning came, they were not to be seen, only their dwellings*,[505] referring to their bodies built by their real spirits. The reality of this specific provenance disappeared, and in their temples remained the life particular to them, by which the skin, hands, feet, tails of whips, and thighs shall

[495] That is to say, some people have realized their situation and how it is that they are journeying inexorably towards God, while others continue on oblivious to this fact.
[496] 12:108
[497] 95:5
[498] Referring to the Prophet.
[499] 46:24
[500] Referring to the words that follow, *Not so; rather it is…*
[501] Any benefit from the rain would come only after the water had been taken in by the crops, which is not as immediate as what that cloud was truly bringing.
[502] 46:24
[503] Wind (*rih*) is related to the word for comfort (*rahah*) as well as to the word for spirit (*ruh*).
[504] The word *ʻadhab* ("punishment") is related by root to the verb "to be sweet".
[505] 46:25

speak.[506] The Divine Writ has related all of this. Yet, He, most high, has described Himself as being jealous. Because of His jealousy He forbade indecencies,[507] and this indecency is none other than what is manifest. As for the indecency that is hidden, it belongs to the one for whom it is manifest. Since He forbade indecency, meaning that He prevented you from knowing the reality of what we have mentioned here, namely that He is identical with things, He veiled it with jealousy, which is you because it is 'other'. The 'other' says that this hearing is Zayd's hearing, but the knower says that this hearing is identical with the Real, and likewise for the other faculties and bodily parts. Not everyone knows the Real. Mankind is ranked in excellence and their ranks are distinguished, making clear who is superior and from whence comes his superiority.

Know that when the Real showed me and made me witness the identities of His Messengers and His Prophets, peace be upon them, those givers of glad-tidings, from Adam to Muhammad, may God bless all of them and grant them peace, in a locus of witnessing I was made to occupy in Cordoba in the year five-hundred and eighty-six, not one within that group spoke to me except Hud, upon him be peace. It was he who informed me of what had occasioned their gathering. I saw him as a man large in comparison to other men, beautiful of form, subtle in discourse, possessing knowledge of things while being an unveiler of them. My proof for his unveiling of them was His saying, *There is no creature that crawls, but He takes it by the forelock. Verily my Lord is on a straight path.*[508] What glad-tiding for creation could be greater than this? Moreover, it is through God's benevolence towards us that these words should reach us from Him in the Qur'an. Then the one who united all things—Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace—made it whole with his news concerning the Real, namely that He is identical with one's hearing, seeing, hand, foot, and tongue; that is to say, He is identical with the senses. The spiritual faculties are closer than the senses. Thus he was content to mention what was more distant and definable, rather than what was closer and whose definition is unknown.[509] The Real interpreted for us what His prophet Hud said to his people as a glad-tiding for us, and the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, interpreted what God said as a glad-tiding. And so knowledge is perfected in the breasts of *those who were*

[506] A reference to a tradition (Tirmidhi 34:19) which tells of the signs of Judgment. The "darkened temples, rugged paths, and veils of pitch" refer to the bodies of the people of 'Ad. Ibn al-'Arabi says that the bodies were built by the spirits in accordance with the doctrine that the soul is the formative principle of the body, and that the body in its form is a manifestation of the soul. The life particular to the body without the soul is the mode of being that bodies possess *qua* body. Since Ibn al-'Arabi asserts that all things are "crawling creatures" even mineral existence is a mode of life.

[507] A reference to the verse, *Say: "My Lord only forbade indecencies, the manifest of them and the hidden of them."* (7:33)

[508] 11:56

[509] From creation's point of view the level of the spirit is closer to God than the level of the body, and so to assert identity in terms of what is more distant from God would necessarily encompass what is closer.

given knowledge, and, *Only the infidels dispute Our signs*. They veil them, although they know them, out of jealousy, covetousness, and injustice.

As it concerns Him, it is strictly through delimitation, be it as an assertion of incomparability or not, that we see some sign from God which He has sent down or some news which He has brought to us concerning what comes from Him. The beginning of it is the Cloud, "…above which there is no air and below which there is no air."[510] God was within it before He created creation. Then it was mentioned that He mounted the Throne, and this, too, is delimitation. Then it is mentioned that He descended to the heaven of this lower world, and this is delimitation.[511] Then it is mentioned that He is in the heavens and in the earth[512] and that He is with us wherever we are,[513] to the point of telling us that He is identical with us.[514] We are delimited things, and so He describes Himself employing nothing but limits. His saying, *There is naught like unto Him,* is also a limit, if we take the 'like' to be extraneous and not for the purposes of the description.[515] Whosoever is distinguished from a delimited thing is delimited by not being identical with that delimited thing. To be absolute beyond qualification is qualification. In the sight of one who possesses understanding, the absolute is qualified by being absolute. And if we consider the 'like' to be part of the description, we delimit Him. If we take *Naught us there like unto His likeness*[516] as the negation of likeness, then we will have realized, through this idea$_f$ and the authentic sayings,[517] that He is identical with things. Things are delimited, though their limits are diverse. He is delimited through the limit of every delimited thing.[518] No thing is limited without this being the limit of the Real. He flows in all things that bear the name "created" and "originated". If the matter were not so, existence would not be a fact. He is identical with existence. And He is *Protector of all things*,[519] in Himself. *And it tireth Him not*,[520] that is, protecting a thing. His protection of all things, transcendent is He, is His protection of His Image lest a thing should be other than His Image. Only this can be, for He is

[510] A reference to a tradition on creation found at the beginning of Tirmidhi's *tafsir* of chapter 11, "'…O Messenger of God, where was our Lord before He created His creation?' He said, 'He was in cloud above which there was no air and below which there was no air, and He created His Throne upon the water.'"

[511] In a saying of the Prophet, God is described as descending to the heaven of the here-below (*al-dunya*), and says, "Is there one who is turning to Me, so that I may turn unto him? Is there one seeking forgiveness, so that I may forgive him?"

[512] *And it is He who in heaven is God and in earth is God.* (43:84)

[513] He is with you wherever you are. (57:4)

[514] Referring to the Divine Saying regarding supererogatory works.

[515] See the discussion of this verse in the Ringstone of Noah.

[516] 42:11

[517] That is to say, through the idea (*mafhum*) expressed in this verse as well as the sayings speaking of God's identity with things.

[518] Both "limit" and "definition" are valid translations for *hadd*, and both can be used in this passage. Recall Ibn al-'Arabi's discussion of defining God in the Ringstone of Noah.

[519] 11:57

[520] 2:255

the Witnesser in the witnesser and the Witnessed in the witnessed. The world is His Image, and He is the governing Spirit of the world, which is the Great Man.[521]

He is all of being
And He is the One in whose
Being my being resides
Because of this I have said He feeds
For my existence is His nourishment
And we follow His example
In Him and from Him—if you contemplate this
From one aspect—I do seek my refuge[522]

Because of this tension He breathed out, and so 'breath' was attributed to the Merciful, because through it He shows mercy to the existentiation of the forms of the world sought after by the divine attributions.[523] We have said of them that they are the manifest aspect of the Real, since He is the Manifest, and that He is their hidden aspect, since He is the Hidden. He is the First, since He is and they are not, and He is the Last since He is identical with them when they manifest. The Last is identical with the Manifest, and the Hidden is identical with the First. *And He knoweth every thing*,[524] because He knows Himself.

Now, since He existentiated the forms in the Breath and since the influence[525] of the attributions spoken of as 'Names' is manifest, divine lineage is possessed by the world. They[526] trace their origin to Him, transcendent is He. He says, "This day I have lowered your lineage and raised My lineage." That is, I have taken your ancestry to yourselves away from you, and have turned you towards ancestry to Me.[527]

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[521] God does not protect all things as a reality from outside of them. As the one and only reality God bestows existence to all things and protects them from nothingness, which is to say that to be anything other than a manifestation of a divine quality is to be precisely nothing. The assertion that the world, as well as man, is in the Image or Form (*surah*) of God is another way of saying that they are His self-disclosures, and He protects their existence by endowing them with His own reality.

[522] No doubt a reference to the saying of the Prophet, "I seek refuge in Thee from Thee." Muslim 4:222

[523] The tension (*karb*) mentioned here is the "yearning" that the divine names have for their manifestation. See below in the Ringstone of Shu'ayb, p.***. where Ibn al-'Arabi discussed the Breath of the All-Merciful further.

[524] 57:3

[525] *Sultan*, which generally means authority or power. Here it is used in almost the same way as determination (*hukm*), in that the divine qualities have a relationship of control over their manifestations in the world.

[526] Referring to the world in the collective sense.

[527] The divine "lineage" or "ancestry" spoken of here is none other than God's being identical with things. Our relation to God is closer than any other relationship, because it is our relationship to our deepest self. All relations disappear in the face of God. In this context Qaysary quotes 23:101, *For*

Where are the godfearing folk? That is, where are those who take God as a protection, such that the Real is their manifest aspect, which is to say that He is identical with their manifest forms?[528] From among all of mankind they are the greatest, most deserving, and the strongest. It can be that the godfearing person is he who makes himself a protection for the Real through his form, since the Selfhood of the Real is the faculties of the slave. Thus that which is called 'slave' would, on the basis of witnessing, be made a protection for that which is called 'the Real', where the knower is distinguished from the ignorant.[529] *Say: Are they equal—those who know and those who know not? Only the men of understanding shall remember*.[530] They are those who contemplate the kernel[531] of a thing, which is what one seeks of that thing. A negligent person does not surpass a diligent one, and similarly a wage-earner is not like a slave.[532]

Now, since the Real is a protection for the Real from one point of view and the slave is a protection for the Real from another, you may speak of being as you so wish. If you so wish, you may say that it is creation, and if you so wish you may say that it is the Real, and if you so wish you may say that it is the Real-creation, and if you so wish you may say that in no respect is it the Real and in no respect is it creation, and if you so wish you may speak of bewilderment in this. Through your designation of the hierarchy what was sought has become plain. If there were no delimitation, the Messengers would not have informed us of the Real's self-transmutation in forms, nor would they have described Him as divesting Himself of forms.[533]

The eye seeth naught but Him
And only He is determined
In His Hands, we belong to Him and *are* through Him
And we stand before Him in every state

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when the Trumpet is blown, that day there shall be no kinship any more between them, neither shall they question one another.

[528] Recall that the word for godfearding (*taqwa*) and protection (*waqayah*) come from the same root, as mentioned in the Ringstone of Adam, p.***.

[529] It is the extent to which the realized person witnesses God that he is distinguished from the unrealized person. In both cases the Selfhood of God is none other than their bodily faculties, but there is an obvious qualitative difference in the case of the first, since he is conscious of the fact.

[530] 39:9

[531] *Men of understanding* is a translation for the idiomatic phrase *ulu'l-albab*, meaning literally something like, "Men of the kernels." The symbolism of the husk and the kernel is a common motif in Sufi literature.

[532] Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to show the superiority of the slave, since the slave looks only to the commands of his Master, while the wage earner works only on the basis of gratification. Here is an example of the positive symbolism associated with slavery, which is spiritualized when man makes himself a slave of God.

[533] This is in reference to the saying where God takes on different forms on the Day of Judgment, Muslim 1:299.

Because of this He is denied, known, declared incomparable, and described. Whosoever sees the Real from Him and in Him with His Eye is a knower. Whosoever sees the Real from Him and in Him with the eye of his soul is not a knower. Whosoever does not see the Real, neither from Him nor in Him, waiting to see Him with his own eye, does not know.

At all events, it must be that each individual be possessed of a belief regarding his Lord, by means of which he returns to Him and within which he seeks after Him. The Real discloses Himself to him within it and acknowledges it. If He disclosed Himself to him as something else he would deny it and seek refuge from it, and would, in reality, be showing bad *adab* with Him, although in his own eyes he is conducting himself with *adab* with Him. One only believes in a divinity through what he has made within his own soul. The divinity of beliefs comes about through this making. They see naught but their own souls and what they have made therein. So contemplate the fact that the hierarchy of mankind in their knowledge of God is their very hierarchy in terms of their vision on the Day of Resurrection.[534] I have taught you the reason that makes this necessary. Beware lest you bind yourself with a specific belief and reject others, for much good will escape you. Indeed, the knowledge of reality *as it is* will escape you. Be then, within yourself, a *hyle* for the forms of all belief, for God is too vast and too great to be confined to one belief to the exclusion of another, for indeed He says, *Wheresoever ye turn, there is the Face of God*.[535] He did not mention one 'wheresoever' as opposed to another. He said that, *there is the Face of God*, and the face of thing is its reality. In this way did He warn the hearts of the knowers not to occupy themselves with the accidents of the life of this lower-world rather than being present to the likes of this. Verily the slave knows not at which breath he will be taken. It may be that he is taken at a moment of forgetfulness, and would not be equal to the one who is taken while being present. Now, although he knows this, in his manifest form and qualified state the perfect slave perseveres in turning his face in Prayer to the direction of the Sacred Mosque. He believes that God is present in his *qiblah*[536] while he is in Prayer, for it is one of the stations of the Face of the Real spoken of in, *Wheresoever ye turn, there is the Face of God*. The direction of the Mosque is included in this, for therein is the Face of God. But do not say that He is only there. Rather, stay with what you perceive and persevere in the *adab* of facing the direction of the Sacred Mosque, and persevere

[534] A person will know God on the Day of Judgment as a function of the way in which he knew Him in life. If his vision was greater here, it will be greater there. This is related to the saying mentioned above, where believers will only acknowledge the form they know, while denying God in another form which they cannot recognize. The reason in both cases is that the self-disclosure that a particular being will receive is determined by his own preparedness, which is the receptivity of his immutable identity.

[535] 2:115

[536] The *qiblah* is the direction to which Muslims orient themselves (facing the Ka'bah in Makkah) during the Prayer.

in the *adab* of not confining the Face to that particular 'wheresoever', for it is one amongst the totality of 'wheresoever's to which one may turn. It has become clear to you, from God most high, that He is in the 'wheresoever' of every direction.

There is nothing but beliefs, and all are right, and he who is right is rewarded, and he who is rewarded is happy, and he who is happy is well-pleased because of it, though he may suffer for a time in the Abode of the Hereafter.[537] The Folk of solicitude, though we know that they are happy, these Folk of the Truth, do become ill and suffer pain in the life of the lower world. Among the slaves of God are those who will be seized by this suffering in the life of the Hereafter, in the abode called Hell.[538] None amongst the Folk of knowledge, those who unveil the affair *as it is*, deny that they shall have an enjoyment particular to them in that abode. Either the pain they were experiencing shall be lifted from them, their enjoyment consisting of the relief from the consciousness of that pain, or they shall have a separate and independent enjoyment, such as the enjoyment of the Folk of Paradise within Paradise. And God knows best.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Opening in the Word of Salih

Among His signs are the signs of the mounts
And this comes from the diversity of the paths
There are those who accomplish the truth with them
And there are those who traverse the wastelands with them
Those who accomplish are the Folk of vision
And those who traverse, those are the strangers
To all there cometh from Him
An opening of His invisibilities from every side[539]

Know, may God grant thee success, that reality is built upon

[537] This is related to the discussion of the special lord of each slave. When Ibn al-'Arabi says that each belief is right (*musib*), what he means is that it is impossible that anything other than God be worshipped in any object of worship. However, each worshipper is only right to the extent that he is worshipping a particular face of God, which does not exclude his denial of other faces. It is this latter fact which leads to suffering and distance from God.

[538] I believe this signifies that for Ibn al-'Arabi, and indeed for many other mystics, pain and trial are an inescapable part of living as a creature journeying to God. Pain and separation are gates to varieties of knowledge and experience which, in the case of some people, would not be possible otherwise.

[539] The riding of mounts is a common motif in Sufi literature, where the mount represents the *nafs* or soul of the spiritual traveler and the rider his spirit or his will to dominate that soul. Some use their mounts to wander aimlessly through wastelands while others guide them in order to accomplish the truth. This evokes Ibn al-'Arabi's aforementioned symbolism which states that everyone is on the straight path of their Lord, although not everyone knows it. The latter are akin to those who use their mounts to "traverse the wastelands."

oddnumberedness.[540] Oddness owns ternariness, proceeding from three onwards. Three is the first odd number. It is by virtue of this divine presence that the world exists. God most high says, *Our Word to a thing when We desire it is 'Be!', and it is*.[541] This is an Essence owning Will and Speech. That thing would not be if it were not for the Essence, Its Will—which is the attribution that denotes attention being turned in a specific way towards the bringing into being of something—and if not for His saying *Be!* upon this attention being turned towards that thing. Moreoever, the oddnumberedness of ternariness is also manifest in that thing; from its standpoint it is through oddnumberedness that its being brought into being and its taking on the quality of existence can become a fact. This[542] is its thingness, its audition, and its following the Command of Him who brought it into being through existentiation. Thus one ternary stands opposite another. Its immutable essence in its state of non-existence corresponds to the Essence of the Existentiator, its audition corresponds to the Will of its Existentiator, and its obedient receptivity to the Command of bringing into being corresponds to His saying *Be!*, and thus it *is*. Bringing into being is attributed to it. Now, if, upon this Word, it were not the case that it came from its own power of bringing into being, it would not have been brought into being. Upon the Command of bringing into being nothing brought this thing into being, after its having not been, other than itself. Thus the Real most high acknowledges that the bringing into being belongs to the thing itself and not to the Real. What belongs to God in its regard is a specific Command. It was thus that He related of Himself, *Our Command to a thing We desire is but that We say 'Be!" and it is*,[543] thus attributing bringing into being to the thing itself upon the Command of God. He is truthful in His Words, and this is in reality how they are to be understood. It is like a master, who is feared and therefore not shown disobedience, saying to his slave, "Stand!" The slave stands, obeying the order of his master. The master has no part in this slave's standing except his command to have him stand. The standing is an act of the slave, not of the master.[544]

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[540] *Fardiyyah* can signify "being one or individual" or "being odd" as opposed to even. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is not considering one as a number, but the origin of number, which is why three is taken to be the first odd number. See Ringstone of Muhammad, p.***.

[541] 16:40

[542] That is, the ternariness from the side of the creature.

[543] 36:82

[544] The phrase "bringing into being" is a translation of the single word (*takwin*), as was mentioned in the Ringstone of Seth (p.***). It signifies the bestowal of existence upon an identity from out of its state of immutability. As mentioned in the Introduction, the quality of manifestation is part of a thing's immutable identity. That is to say, the fact of its existence is part of what it is in itself. The possibility of coming into being was already given by God in the Holiest Emanation (*al-fayd al-aqdas*), and this possibility is actualized through the Holy Emanation (*al-fayd al-muqaddas*) by divine fiat *Be!*. Another way of stating this is that the power of bringing into being is part of God's first, invisible self-disclosure (*tajalli al-ghayb*), while the fact of its coming into being results from the identity's hearing God's command to be. This is the second or visible self-disclosure (*tajalli al-shahadah*).

Thus, the principle of bringing into being stands on ternariness. That is to say, it comes from three from two sides: the side of the Real and the side of creation. This also holds true in the existentiation of meanings arrived at by proof. A proof must be made up of three things, following a specific ordering and specific conditions, and from which one will necessarily yield a result. That is to say, a thinker will construct his proof from two premises, each premise containing two single terms, there thus being four. One of these four is repeated in the two premises in order to connect one of them to the other, a kind of marriage, so that there are three of them and no more, due to the repetition of one of them therein. One arrives at the conclusion when there occurs this specific kind of ordering, which is that one of the two premises should be bound to the other through the repetition of that one single term by which ternariness becomes a fact. The specific condition is that the judgment should apply more broadly than the cause or be equal to it in scope; it will then be valid.[545] If this is not

[545] Take for example:

This is a man
All men are animals
This is an animal

"This is an animal" is a judgment that can apply to other entities beyond those animals which are men. For example:

This is a horse
All horses are animals
This is an animal

"This is an animal" is therefore a judgment that is more universal than what is addressed by, "All men are animals." For an example of the judgment being equivalent to the reason, we have the following (see end of paragraph in the text):

This entity is a man
All men are rational
This entity is rational

The judgment does not apply to entities beyond what is addressed by, "All men are rational." "Rational" and "men" are equivalent. An example of an invalid proof is the following:

All men are animals
Some animals are horses
All or some men are horses

Qaysari gives the following example to explain the passage. He begins by stating that by judgment (*hukm*) what Ibn al-'Arabi means is that regarding which the judgment is made (*makhum bihi*). By reason (*'illah*) he is referring to the middle term, because it is the reason for the judgment in the conclusion. For example:

Man is an animal
All animals are corporeal
Man is corporeal

the case, one will arrive at an invalid result. This is to be found in the world, as when one relates acts to a slave bereft of their relationship to God, or when one attributes to God, in an absolute way, the bringing into being which we encounter. The Real only attributed it[546] to the thing to which it was said *Be!* For example, if we wish to prove that the existence of the world is based on some occasion, we would say that whatever comes to be has an occasion. We thus have "what comes to be" and "occasion". Then we say, in the next premise, that the world comes to be, and this "comes to be" is repeated in both premises. The third term is our phrase "the world", thus yielding the conclusion that the world has an occasion. What was mentioned in the first premise, namely the "occasion", appears in the conclusion. The specific form is the repetition of "comes to be". The specific condition is the general applicability of the cause, because the cause of the existence of "what comes to be" is the occasion,[547] and which is general in the case of the coming to be of the world from God, which is the judgment. We therefore judge that whatever comes to be has an occasion, whether that occasion[548] be equivalent to the judgment or whether the judgment be more general than it such that it would fall under its status.[549] It is thus that the conclusion is valid. And so this property of the ternary also appears in the existentiation of the meanings arrived at through proofs.

The principle of being is ternariness, and for this reason the Wisdom of Salih, peace be upon him, was the one God manifested when He delayed taking his people for three days, *a promise not to be belied*.[550] It was concluded truthfully,[551] through the *Cry* by which God destroyed them. *They met the morning, in their homes, lying*

In this case "being corporeal" is the judgment, and is more general than animal. As for an example where there is an equal scope:

> Man is an animal
> All animals have sense perception
> Man has sense perception

"Animal" is by definition equal to "possessing sense perception".

The middle term or premise is called "cause" because it is the cause (*'illah*) for the judgment in the conclusion.

[546] That is, the bringing into being (*takwin*).

[547] According to Qashani, the Shaykh using license in identifying "occasion" as the reason, as opposed to the fact that whatever comes to be has an occasion.

[548] According to Qaysari this particular instance of "occasion" (*sabab*) is not the same "occasion" mentioned in the proof. Rather, it refers to the middle term, "The world comes to be," meaning that it is the occasion or reason for the subject and predicate of the conclusion to be linked together.

[549] That is to say, such that it (the middle term) would fall under its (the judgment's) status. In the example above, this means that the judgment "possesses sense perception" is equal to "is an animal", whereas "is corporeal" is more general than and contains "is an animal".

[550] After Thamud, the people of Salih, ham-strung the she-camel which they were commanded not to harm, Salih said, *'Take joy in your habitation three days—that is a promise not to be belied.'* (11:65)

[551] Using the same language here employed for the validity (*sidq*) of the result of a logical proof

on their faces.[552] On the first of the three days, the faces of the people became yellow, on the second day red, and on the third, black. At the end of the three days the preparedness became a fact. It was then manifest that there was corruption in them, and this manifestation was called *destruction*. The yellowing of the faces of the wretched corresponds to the glow that comes from the faces of the felicitous, mentioned in His Words, *Some faces that day shall shine laughing*,[553] coming from the word for 'uncovering the face,' which is manifestation, and similarly the yellowing was the sign of affliction becoming manifest in Salih's people. Then, corresponding to the redness residing in them, there came the laughter He spoke of regarding the felicitous. Indeed laughter is an occasion that produces reddening of the face, and for the felicitous this is the reddening of their cheeks. Then He made the "joyous" he mentioned to correspond to the blackening of the skin[554] of the wretched. This is the effect happiness had on their skin, just as blackness was the effect had on the skin of the wretched. For this reason he spoke of both groups using the word *tidings*, that is, He spoke a Word to them that affected their skin, by which it changed to a color the skin had not hitherto possessed. Regarding the felicitous He said, *Their Lord giveth them tidings of Mercy from Him, and good-pleasure*.[555] Regarding the wretched He said, *So give them tidings of a grievous punishment*.[556] The effect of these Words on the souls of each group had an effect on their skin. All that was manifest to them in their outward aspect was the determination of the $idea_f$ embedded in them inwardly. Nothing affected them but themselves, just as their being brought into being comes only from themselves. *And God's is the most convincing argument.*[557]

Whosoever understands this Wisdom and establishes it in his soul, making it such as to be witnessed by him, relieves himself of attachment to other things, and knows that neither benefit nor harm come to him from other than himself. By benefit I mean what is consonant with his desire and does no harm to his nature or to his temperament. He who possesses this witnessing makes the pleas of all existent things for them, even if they do make no such plea on their own behalf, and he knows that everything he undergoes comes from himself, as we mentioned earlier regarding the fact that knowledge depends upon the known thing. When something that is not consonant with his desires does befall him, he says to himself, "Thy hands marked and thy mouth blew."[558] And God speaketh the Truth, and guideth unto the Path.

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[552] 11:67
[553] 80:38 Here the word for shining is *musfirah*, related to the word *sufur* or "uncovering of the face".
[554] "Joyous" translates *mustabshirah*, related to *basharah*, the word used here for "skin", as well as *bushra* ("tiding").
[555] 9:21
[556] 3:21
[557] 6:149
[558] Meaning that he is the source of what happens to him.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Heart in the Word of Shu'ayb

Know that the heart, meaning the heart of him who knows God, is of the Mercy of God, and is vaster than it, for it encompasses the Real, illustrious is His Majesty, but His Mercy does not.[559] This is the language of the common folk by way of allusion, for indeed the Real shows Mercy but is not shown Mercy. Mercy has no determination over Him.

As for allusion in the language of the elite, it is that God describes Himself using the word "breath", which comes from the word for "giving vent",[560] and that the Divine Names are identical with the Named, being none other than Him, and that they require what is accorded by the realities; these realities which are required by the Names are none other than the world. To be divine requires an object of divinity, and to be a lord requires a vassal. It could not be otherwise, since they have no identity[561] without it, neither existentially nor conceptually. The Real, by virtue of His Essence, is beyond need of the worlds. Lordship does not possess this status. Thus reality remains between what lordship requires and what the Essence demands in its being beyond need of the worlds. In reality lordship and the possession of quality are identical with the Essence.[562]

Since reality undergoes reciprocal conflict by virtue of the attributions, we encounter in the tradition that the Real is compassionate towards His slaves.[563] That by whose existentiation He first granted release for lordship—through His Breath, which is attributed to the All-Merciful—was the world, which is required by lordship in its reality as well as by all of the Divine Names.[564] In this way it is established that His Mercy encompasses all things, thus encompassing the Real. It is thus vaster than the heart, or equal to it in scope.[565]

This having been said, may it be that you shall know that the Real, as has been

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[559] A reference to the Divine Saying, "My heavens and My earth encompass Me not, but the heart of My believing slave encompasseth Me." See *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 396.

[560] Breath, *nafas*, is here related to *tanfis*, or giving vent.

[561] Identity is here used to express concreteness or real being, in the sense mentioned in the Introduction meaning, "personal or individual existence." The "they" refers to the Names which require the existence of the world.

[562] From the point of view of the Essence or Self, God is beyond need of the worlds. "Lordship" (*rububiyyah*) indicates God insofar as He possesses Qualities which can only be real in the presence of a world.

[563] That is to say, because we meet with both the Qualities of Majesty and those of Beauty, God reassures us that Mercy has priority over Wrath because it encompasses all things.

[564] This refers back to the aforementioned "tension" which the Divine Breath relieves. Lordship, and here all the Divine Names, essentially require their own manifestation and expression to be what they really are.

[565] Recall that this passage is meant to explain things in the language of the elite, and in reality the heart is not vaster than mercy, because it is precisely mercy that grants reality to all things including the heart. The heart can be "equal in scope" in the sense that man, in his total reality, encompasses all the divine Qualities.

confirmed in the authentic tradition,[566] self-transmutes in forms upon His self-disclosure, and that while the Real is encompassed by the heart, no created thing is likewise encompassed with Him. It is as though He fills it. This means that when one sees the Real upon His self-disclosure to him, it is not possible for him to see anything together with Him. The scope of the knower's heart is as was spoken of by Abu-Yazid al-Bistami, "If the Throne[567] and what it encompasses were found one thousand thousand times in one of the corners of the heart of the knower, he would not sense it." This is what Junayd[568] meant when he said, "When what comes to be is joined with the eternal, its effect is no more." The heart encompasses the eternal, so how could it sense something that comes to be as being existent?[569]

Since the self-disclosure of the Real is variegated in forms, the heart necessarily becomes more vast or more confined in accordance with the form within which the divine self-disclosure takes place; it does not go at all beyond the form within which the self-disclosure takes place. The heart of the knower or perfect man is like the setting for the stone of a ring.[570] It does not exceed it, but rather follows its measurements and its shape. It will be round if it is a circular stone, or will be four-sided, six-sided, eight-sided, or some other shape if the stone is square, hexagonal, octagonal, or some other shape. The setting will bear only its likeness.

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[566] Muslim, 1:299. Part of this tradition reads, "God, blessed and transcendent is He, will come to them in other than the form which they know. He will say, 'I am your Lord.' They will then say, 'We seek refuge in God from you. We will stay here until our Lord comes, glorified and majestic is He. When our Lord comes we will know Him.' Then God, blessed and transcendent is He, will come to them in the form which they know, and will say, 'I am your Lord.' They will then say, 'Thou art our Lord.'"

[567] The Throne of God, which stands at the apex of the cosmos. Here "the Throne and all it encompasses" refers to the world.

[568] Abu'l-Qasim al-Junayd, the famous Baghdadi Sufi, d. 910.

[569] The heart mentioned here is not just any heart, but the heart of the true knower (*'arif*), which possesses a receptivity for all possible self-disclosures of God.

[570] *Mahall fass al-khatim*, literally the locus for the ring's gem. This phrasing and the discussion which follows makes it quite clear that *fass* refers to whatever rests in the setting and not to the setting itself as some have thought. On this passage Qaysari notes that, "The heart is likened to the locus of the *fass* and the self-disclosed form to the *fass*." Moreover this is the lexicographical definition of *fass*; see both Lane's *Lexicon* and *Lisan al-'arab*. A *fass* is also describes as the quintessence (*khilasah*, *zubdah*) of a thing. In the Ringstone of Seth *fass* is used in a somewhat different sense: Man bears the imprint of all of the Divine Names. As the axis or center which bears all the Divine Qualities, man protects the existence of the other qualities in the cosmos. His inner reality is imprinted upon the beings of the world. The *fass* is the locus for the seal because any imprint or seal will be found in that *fass*, i.e. the physical structure that will carry the raised imprint (according to the traditional practice of stamping one's personal seal in something using a ring). It is thus not to be confused with the use of locus in the present passage, where the locus is that of the *fass* itself, not the seal or imprint. In this passage the symbolism is the receptivity of the heart being likened to the shape of the setting and the nature of the descending wisdom to the shape of the stone. The mystery which Ibn al-'Arabi discussing is this: does the nature of the heart determine the nature of the self-disclosure or is it the reverse? He explains by pointing out that the receptivity of the heart is itself a self-disclosure, which is then followed by another. These are the aforementioned invisible self-disclosure and visible self-disclosure, or the Holiest Emanation and the Holy Emanation.

Now, this is the opposite of what the Folk[571] say, namely that the Real becomes manifest in the measure of the preparedness of the slave, but this is not so, for the slave becomes manifest to the Real in the measure of the form within which the Real self-discloses to him. The resolution of this question is that God has two self-disclosures: an invisible self-disclosure and a visible self-disclosure. From the self-disclosure of the invisible He grants the preparedness of the heart. This is the self-disclosure of the Essence, whose reality is the invisible, and is the Selfhood He claims in saying of Himself, *He*. '*He*' is always His, always and everlastingly.[572] When this preparedness is actualized in it—that is, in the heart—He discloses Himself to it through a self-disclosure of the visible in the realm of the visible, and it sees Him. It is manifest in the form of what was disclosed to it, as we have already said. He, most high, grants it the preparedness in His Saying, *He granteth everything its creation*.[573]

He then lifts the veil from between Himself and His slave,[574] who then sees Him in the form of what He believes. It is identical with what he believes. Neither the heart nor the eye ever witness anything but the form of what one believes concerning the Real. The Real of what is believed is that whose form is encompassed by the heart. It is that which self-discloses to it and is known by it. The eye only sees

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[571] Referring to the Sufis.

[572] *Huwa* literally means He, although I have been rendering *Huwiyyah* as Selfhood instead of He-ness or Ipseity, as others have done. I believe this translation is justified and even superior because the pronoun *huwa* in Arabic is not strictly confined to the third person. The notion of a thing *itself*, of being *none other*, is one of the uses of *huwa* in Arabic. For example, *huwa huwa* literally means, "it is it," but really means, "This is the thing itself." It is this reflexive shade that is lost when *huwa* or *huwiyyah* is translated as He or He-ness. Ipseity literally means, "Itself-ness," which I think is more elegantly rendered in English by Selfhood instead of using a Latinate term. *Huwa* is used to designate the unconditioned Divine Essence, beyond the relationship of "I" and "Thou", which is to say beyond duality, and because the Divine *dhat* can also be rendered as Self—the *dhat* of a thing is linguistically and philosophically the thing itself—the rendering of *huwa* as Self is in keeping with the interchangeability, from one point of view, of *al-Dhat* (Self, Essence) and *Huwa* (He), the former used more often to express the philosophical idea while the latter is meant to express the mystery. The notion of self is not restricted to the first person, since first would imply second and third; rather, pure selfhood is beyond relationality as is the metaphysical concept *huwa*. *Huwa* does not carry a strictly third person significance. The following quote from Amir 'Abd al-Qadir is helpful, where he is interpreting a Quranic verse that contains the pronoun *huwa*, which he says refers to God:

Huwa is not used here as a third person pronoun (the absent person) which is grammatically related to a first person (one who speaks), and to a second one (one to whom one speaks) [for this would imply a multiplicity, which is infinitely transcended by the metaphysical *huwa*]. Allah did not say *la-ana* "certainly I," for the pronoun *ana* has a determinative character since it implies presence. (*The Spiritual Writings of Amir 'Abd al-Kader*, tr. Michel Chodkiewicz, Albany, NY, 1995, p. 46)

Thus, if *huwa* can be rendered as "Self", *huwiyyah* is Self-ness, Self-ity, Selfhood. I believe what Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to say in this passage is that at the deepest part of any being resides a spark of Divine Selfhood. To say that *He* is always and everlastingly God's is to say that any he-ness or selfhood is always God's He-ness or Selfhood.

[573] 20:50

[574] He is referring to the remainder of this verse, *He granteth all things their creation, then guideth*.

the Real of belief. Now, there is no hiding the diversity of beliefs. Whosoever qualifies Him denies Him in what is other than that by which he qualifies Him, yet drawing nearer to Him through that by which He qualifies Him when He discloses Himself. Whosoever will declare Him absolute beyond such qualification will not deny Him, and will draw nearer to Him in every form within which He self-transmutes, and from himself will grant Him the measure of any form that self-discloses to him, and will do so infinitely.[575]

Indeed, the forms of self-disclosure have no end where one might stop. Such is the knowledge one has of God, which has no final end at which the knower might stop. Indeed, he is a knower at every moment, and yearns for increase in his knowledge of Him, *My Lord, grant me increase in knowledge*.[576] The affair is infinite from both sides.[577] This is so when you speak of "Real" and "creation".[578] If you contemplate His Words, "I will be his foot with which he steppeth, His hand by which he graspeth, his tongue by which he speaketh . . ." and so forth for the other faculties, and whose locus is the bodily parts, you will make no separations, and will say that the thing is entirely the Real or entirely creation. It is creation according to a certain ascription and is the Real in accordance with another, and the identity is one. The identity of the form that discloses itself is the identity of the form that receives that self-disclosure. He is the self-discloser and the locus of self-disclosure. Contemplate how wondrous it is with God, with respect to His Selfhood and with respect to His relationship to the world through the realities of His beautiful Names![579]

Who is there and what is there?
"There is" is identical with "there is"
Whoever universalizes Him specifies Him
And whoever specifies Him universalizes Him[580]

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[575] God is only known to the extent that the heart is prepared to know Him. The "God of beliefs" is the totality of forms in which the believer is able to know and acknowledge God. His heart does not have the receptivity to find God outside of these beliefs. He draws closer to God through his beliefs, but unwittingly denies Him and distances himself from Him by denying other forms that his heart does not have the capacity to comprehend. Obviously, then, it is insofar as He fills the receptivity of a heart that God is encompassed by the heart. It is only the true knower (*'arif*) who has perfect receptivity and does not deny God, regardless of the form of self-disclosure.

[576] 20:114

[577] That is to say, the self-disclosures of God are infinite, and the possibilities of knowledge from the side of creation are infinite as well.

[578] Which is to say, if you are looking at it from the perspective of duality.

[579] "With respect to His Selfhood," refers to unity, while, "His relationship to the world through the realities of His beautiful Names," refers to duality between the divine qualities and the realities (i.e., the world) which they essentially require.

[580] One can understand this to mean that by declaring God's universality (*'umum*, which is also correctly translated as "generality") one restricts Him to that universality, while declaring him to be specific amounts to asserting His universality because in the oneness of His being He encompasses all that which possesses being.

No identity is outside another
Light shares identity with darkness
Whoever overlooks this
Will find sorrow in himself
Only a slave of willpower
Will know what I say

Surely in that there is a reminder to him who has a heart,[581] due to its fluctuation[582] in various forms and qualities. He did not say, "for one possessed of intellect," for the intellect encloses the affair in a single description.[583] In truth, the reality scorns being thus enclosed. It is not a remembrance for "him who has an intellect". They are the people of beliefs, *who deny one another and curse one another, and they have no helpers*.[584] The divinity of the holder of some belief has no determination over the divinity of another. The holder of a belief defends it—that is, what he believes concerning his divinity—and helps it. That which is his belief, though, does not help him, and for this reason it leaves no effect on the belief of one who disputes with him. Such is the case for the disputant, who has no help from the divinity of his belief. The Real disallows help for the divinities of beliefs, because each believer is isolated and alone. What receives help is the totality, and the helper is the totality.[585]

In the sight of the knower, the Real is the known that is not denied. The Folk of the Known[586] in this lower world are the Folk of the Known in the hereafter. For

[581] 50:37, which fully reads, *Surely in that there is a reminder for him who has a heart, or gives ear as a witness*, which Arberry alternatively translates, *or will give ear with a present mind*.
[582] The two words for heart (*qalb*) and fluctuation (*taqallub*) are linked by the root q-l-b.
[583] Here *'aql* (intellect or intelligence, and in this context even reason) is being contrasted with the heart, which is seen as the center and source of all human faculties, *'aql* here being seen as the power in man to delimit and define. Ibn al-'Arabi is no doubt drawing on one of the meanings of the '-q-l root of "to bind". It is the *'aql* in this sense which is the maker of the "divinity of beliefs".
[584] 3:22
[585] The divinity of belief is made in the soul of the believer, which is why it can have no effect on the divinity of belief of another believer. Each believer in the divinity of belief argues against those who would deny it and thus 'defends' it. In reality the totality of believer, with their varied beliefs, is what receives help through the efforts of these believers to defend their believed divinities. They are the agent of this defense, and in the end they are its recipients because they are defending a creation of their own souls.

This is not to say that Ibn al-'Arabi is equating the divinity of beliefs with idol worship. The former are the limiting ideas within the soul, while the latter are concretely fashioned forms outside of the believer.
[586] *Ahl al-ma'ruf*, which literally means the people of that which is known, in this case God. It should also be noted that the word *ma'ruf* is an extremely significant in the Qur'an, and usually appears in contrast to the word *munkar*, which here is translated as "denied". The Qur'an enjoins the believers to enjoin the *ma'ruf* and to forbid the *munkar*, which is to say that in the Quranic context they refer to good and evil, or right and wrong. Thus, in an imagination shaped by the Quran, the phrase Folk of the Known, which is justified by the context, would evoke the meaning of Folk of the Good. In contrast, to say that God is "not denied" (*la yunkar*) implies that only he who acknowledges God in every self-disclosure is totally free from evil or wrongdoing (*munkar*).

this reason He said, *him who has a heart*.[587] He knows the fluctuation of the Real in forms through pondering[588] the appearances.[589] From himself he knows himself, and his self is not other than the Selfhood of the Real. No being is there that *is* and is other than the Selfhood of the Real; indeed, it is identical with that Selfhood. In one form He is the knower, the knowledgeable, and what is acknowledged, and in another form He is the one who is neither knower nor knowledgeable, and He is denied.[590] This is the share of one who, with the eye of union, knows God through self-disclosure and witnessing, spoken of in His Words, *to him who has a heart*, and is variegated[591] in his act of pondering it.

As for the Folk of Faith, they are imitators. They imitate the prophets and the messengers in what they have related to us of the Real. They are not those who follow the companion of thought, who interpret the transmitted sayings by means of their intellectual proofs. Now, those who follow the messengers, may the blessings of God and His peace be upon them, are the ones referred to in His Words, transcendent is He, *or gives ear*,[592] that is, to what the divine sayings relate on the tongues of the prophets, may they receive the peace and blessings of God. This means that this person who *gives ear* is a witness, and this alerts us to the presence of imagination and its utilization, spoken of in his words concerning excellence, upon him be peace, "That you worship God as if you see Him."[593] "God is in the *qiblah* of him who prays,"[594] and who is, for that reason, a witness. Whosoever imitates a companion of mental reasoning and is bound by it[595] is not the one who *gives ear*, for this one who *gives ear* must be a witness to we have spoken of. When one is not a witness to what we have spoken of, he is not the one intended by this verse. These are the ones of which God spoke, saying, *When those who are followed are no longer answerable for those who followed*.[596] The Messengers never cease to be answerable for their

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[587] 50:37
[588] *Taqlib*, which is related by the root q-l-b to "fluctuation" (*taqallub*) and "heart" (*qalb*).
[589] That is to say, he knows the variegation of the divine self-disclosure through contemplating its diverse manifestations.
[590] Here there is a distinction between *'arif* and *'alim*, which have been rendered as "knower" and "knowledgeable". The former signifies more elevated, mystical knowledge, whereas the latter refers to knowledge more generally. "That which is acknowledged" is another way of saying the object of knowledge. That is to say, for some He is both the knowing subject and the known object, while for others He is neither.
[591] That is, the knower
[592] 50:37
[593] This is in reference to the famous tradition where Gabriel comes in human form and questions the prophet about the three levels of religion: *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith) and *ihsan* (virtue, excellence). What Ibn al-'Arabi mentions here is part of the answer to the question, "What is excellence?" The rest of the answer is, "…and if you do not see Him, yet He sees you." Muslim 1:1
[594] A saying of the Prophet according to Qaysari.
[595] That is, by mental reasoning.
[596] 2:66

followers, who follow them.[597]

Realize, my friend, what I have recalled for you in this Wisdom of the Heart. As for its being particular to Shu'ayb, this is due to the ramifications[598] contained in it. That is, its ramifications are not confinable, because every belief is a ramification, and so all of them are ramifications—that is, the beliefs—because when the covering is removed it is removed in accordance with what one believes, or it can be that it is removed such as to conflict with the judgment in which one believes. This is spoken of in His Words, *From God there shall appear unto them that which they were not wont to consider*.[599] Most differences occur over judgment, such as the Mu'tazilite who believes that God will carry out His threat concerning the disobedient person who dies unrepentant. When he dies and is shown mercy by God, a solicitude having already determined that he not be punished, he finds God to be Forgiving and Compassionate. There appeared to him from God that which he was not wont to consider.[600] Regarding the Selfhood, some slaves judge, in their belief, that God is such and such, and when the covering is removed they see the form of what they believe, which is true, and they believe in it. Then the knot is undone and the belief disappears, and becomes a knowledge through witnessing. After this sharpening of sight dull vision shall not return.[601] To some slaves, when they achieve vision, He appears through a diversity of self-disclosure in forms, differing from what they

[597] Below the rank of those possessing realized knowledge are the believers, who imitate and follow the messengers. They listen to the revelation in a state of being *shahid*, or "witness" or alternatively "one who is present". Ibn al-'Arabi is setting out the superiority of a believer who affirms the concrete manifestation of revelation and messengerhood over the system of rationalist thinkers, who make God so incomparable and distant from the world that they interpret all of revelation and the sayings of the Prophet as determined by their dry conceptual framework. The messengers are not answerable for these people because they never really "gave ear" to the revelation, instead choosing to follow their own rational powers. It is necessary for the true follower to make use of the imagination, since it is only through imagination that man can comprehend the manifestation of God in the world, and this includes revelation and prophethood. Thus even for the simple believer who faithfully holds to facing the *qiblah* in Prayer, God is present to him and he to God ("God is in the *qiblah* of him who prays"). It is for this reason that Ibn al-'Arabi mentions the famous encounter with Gabriel, where the angel describes *ihsan* or perfection as worshipping God as if one saw Him, since He sees us even if we do not see Him.

[598] The name Su 'ayb and "ramifications" (*tasha''ub*) are linked by the root sh-'-b.

[599] 39:47

[600] Many disagreements about God center around the fate of souls in the afterlife. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is disagreeing with the Mutazilite view and using them as an example of people who will find that God, in his judgment in the next life, will not be what they thought He would be.

[601] The Quran speaks of the keen vision of the next world which the person on the verge of death has, And *every soul shall come, and with it a driver and a witness. 'Thou was heedless of this; therefore We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight today is piercing.'* (50:21-22) Qaysari mentions that this sentence of Ibn al-'Arabi is a response to certain believers in transmigration who say that, "After total manifestation there occurs total hiddenness." That is to say, he does not believe that the soul, after having gone through its development in this world, will then recoil back to a state of non-manifestation and start life anew with no continuity to the life he has already lived. Later, a philosopher such as Mulla Sadra would say that the soul, after having undergone successive states of actualization, could never go back to a state of pure potentiality.

believed, because it[602] does not repeat. For them it is true that *there shall appear to them from God*, concerning His Selfhood, *that which they were not wont to consider*, that is, what they were wont to consider before the removing of the covering.[603] We have mentioned the form of ascension after death in the divine sciences of the Book of Self-Disclosures,[604] when we speak of our meeting with one of the Troop in unveiling as well as what we taught him regarding this question, things he had not previously known.

Among the most wondrous of things is that one is always ascending, though not aware of it due to the subtleness and fineness of the veil, and due to the resemblance of forms, spoken of in His Words, *And they shall be given its like*.[605] The one is not identical with the other, for indeed two similars are, in the sight of the knower, two similars and two 'others'. The man of realization sees multiplicity in the one, just as he knows that what the Divine Names indicate, though they are diverse in their realities and are multiple, is a single identity.[606] This multiplicity is intelligible in an identity that is one. In self-disclosure, there is multiplicity witnessed in a single identity, just as *hyle* is included in the definition of every form. Even though there is the multiplicity and diversity of the forms, in reality they come from a single substance, namely their *hyle*.[607] Whoso knows himself by this knowledge knows his Lord, for indeed He created him in His Image; indeed, he is identical with His Selfhood and His Reality. For this reason, none of the men of knowledge have discovered this knowledge of the soul except the godly, namely the Messengers and

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[602] That is, the self-disclosure

[603] On the one hand, the knot which makes up the particular form of belief is not a negative thing, because through it God allows the believer to approach him. When the reality of what they believed becomes unveiled, this knowledge through mental belief becomes knowledge through direct vision. On the other hand, it can happen that God reveals Himself in a form that seems foreign. This is an inevitability, owing to the sheer limitlessness of the divine self-disclosures and the limited nature of human hearts as they grow in their capacity to acknowledge the diverse manifestations of God. As Ibn al-'Arabi has had occasion to mention, the believer will go on rejecting forms until he is presented with one he can acknowledge.

[604] *Kitab al-Tajalliyat*, ed. Osman Yahya, Tehran 1988, p. 368. There Ibn al-'Arabi describes a meeting he had with Junayd in the imaginational world.

[605] 2:25

[606] By ascension (*taraqqi*) Ibn al-'Arabi means the gradual growth of the soul through the manifestation of its immutable identity. Just as some souls are not aware that they are on the straight path of the Lord, so too are many souls not aware that they are always ascending towards their immutable identity. What the soul encounters in life is always different and meaningful, but it may not acknowledge this fact because often things appear to repeat without purpose. This is contrary to Ibn al-'Arabi's view of manifestation, which states that there is no repetition in the divine self-disclosure (*la takrar fi'l-tajalli*). The single divine Reality is manifest in forms which resemble (*tashabuh*) one another but which are, every one, a unique self-disclosure. The Quranic verse invoked here refers to the gifts received in Paradise, which will resemble what we knew in the here-below. The point is that although they are similar they must be different, because they are *similar* and not purely and simply identical.

[607] According to Qaysari, *hyle* is here the universal *hyle* that receives the forms of all existents. He points out that in *Insha' al-dawa'ir* Ibn al-'Arabi says that it (*hyle*) is substance (*jawhar*). This is not substance in the sense of substance-accident, but of the receptive principle that is common to all things.

the Sufis. As for the companions of reasoning and the masters of thinking—namely the ancients and the theologians in their theological discussions concerning the soul and its quiddity—none have discovered its reality, and mental reasoning will never grant it. Whosoever seeks knowledge of it by way of mental reasoning does so in vain.[608] Such are certainly among those *whose efforts lead them astray in the life of this lower world, thinking that they are doing something good*.[609] Whosoever seeks this affair through other than its proper way shall not obtain it. How beautiful are God's words concerning the world and its transformation through the Breaths, *in a new creation*, in a single identity! Concerning some people, indeed, concerning most of the world, He says, *Nay, they are uncertain about a new creation*.[610] They do not know of the renewal of the affair through the Breaths. However, the Ash'arites did discover it in the case of certain existents, namely accidents, while the Sophists[611] discovered it in the case of the entire world. The philosophers considered the whole lot to be ignorant. Now, both groups are in error. As for the error of the Sophists, it is that—although they speak of the transformation of the world in its entirety—they fail to discover the oneness of the identity of the substance that receives this form. It cannot exist except through this identity, and is not intelligible without this substance.[612] If they had said *that*, they would have attained realization in the matter. As for the Ash'arites, they have failed to know that the entire world is a totality of

[608] The second half of this sentence is an Arabic proverb that literally means something to the effect of, "Such a one seeks to get fat off of tumors and breathes not lavender."

[609] 18:104

[610] 50:15

[611] "Sophists" translates *al-husbaniyyah*. The Asharites spoke of the world as a single substance, as Ibn al-'Arabi mentions in the Ringstone of Luqman, where he also points out that they consider this to be a substance separate from God. This one substance undergoes all the innumerable accidents of the world. The Sophists, according to Ibn al-'Arabi, asserted that the entire world was in a series of unending flux, which no continuity to bind together these accidents. The Asharites correctly identified the principle which Ibn al-'Arabi speaks of as "renewal through Breaths" by speaking of the accidents of the underlying substance, while the Sophists correctly identified this principle by asserting that the entire world was always changing. The Asharites err, however, because they consider the substance of the world to be something apart from God, while the Sophists incorrectly believe that there is no oneness underlying the apparent change and flux.

Ibn al-'Arabi's position is to acknowledge the multiplicity and change of the world together with the oneness that carries, as it were, this flux. The Asharites are wrong in their doctrine of substance because the definition of substance is that which stands on its own, as opposed to an accident or coincident which does not stand on its own but needs a substance in which to exist. Anger is an accident of a man who is angry. For Ibn al-'Arabi the world relies on the divine Breaths in the same way words subsist on a speaker's breath. It is this breath which is the true substance of things. In this language of "substance" an "accident", substance belongs wholly to the divine side, while the world is all accident subsisting through this substance. The divine Breath is none other than a dimension or aspect of the Divine Essence, and thus is truly one.

[612] In this sentence, the difference between masculine and feminine pronouns for substance (*jawhar*, masc.) and identity (*'ayn*, fem.) justifies translating the pronouns using the proper nouns, since there is no room for ambiguity in the Arabic use of pronouns. Ontologically it (the world) depends wholly on the one identity (God or the divine Breath), while conceptually we cannot conceive ("is not intelligible) of anything in the world without a single underlying notion that runs throughout, whether this notion is "being" or "reality" or "substance" or "*hyle*".

accidents. It undergoes transformation at every moment, since no accident remains for two moments. This is evident in the definitions of things. When they define a thing, these accidents[613] are evident in their definition, as is the fact that the accidents mentioned in its definition are this very self-standing substance and its[614] reality. Insofar as it is an accident it does not stand on its own. From the totality of what does not stand on its own comes what *does* stand on its own.[615] Take for example the occupation of a void—part of its[616] what-it-is—found in the definition of a self-subsisting substance.[617] Its reception of accidents is also essential to its definition. There is no doubt that the receiving is an accident, because it cannot stand on its own—since it can only *be* in a receptacle, which is essential to the substance.[618] The occupation of a void is an accident that can only be found in an occupier of a void; it does not stand on its own. Now, the occupation of a void as well as receptivity are not extrinsic to this very defined substance, because the definitions of the essence are the very defined object and its selfhood.[619] Thus, that which does not remain for two moments comes to remain for two moments and more, and that which does not stand on its own comes to stand on its own.[620] They are not aware of what they undergo,

[613] Qaysari mentions an alternate reading which would translate, "That it *is* these accidents is evident in their definition," but since this idea is expressed in the second half of the sentence, the other reading appears more correct.

[614] That is, the substance's.

[615] To possess accidents is not accidental to substance, but is an intrinsic aspect of it. For example, in man the various emotional states are all accidents of his substance, but the capacity to experience emotion is not accidental to his substance. When man is defined as a rational animal, and animal is defined as a sense-perceiving body, but every individual sense-perception is an accident. It is in this way that accidents are implicit in the logical definition of a thing.

[616] That is, it is part of the what-it-is or quiddity of the self-standing substance.

[617] "Occupation of a void" translates *tahayyuz*. Jurjani defines *hayyiz* as, "A theoretical void (*faragh mutawahham*) occupied by an extended entity such as a body or by a non-extended entity such as an atom." *Kitab al-ta'rifat*, p. 99.

[618] The "which" refers to the receptacle, which is to say that being a receptacle is part of the essence of the substance. This occupation of a void, as well as its capacity to receive accidents, is essential to the substance. However, such and such occupation and such and such reception are accidents. Now, from one point of view the substance as "receptacle" is none other than the totality of receptions which it undergoes, just as the substance as "occupier of a void" is none other than the totality of the occupations of voids which it undergoes. Remember that being-a-receptacle and being-an-occupier-of-a-void are intrinsic aspects of the theoretical substance in question here.

[619] Here definitions (*hudud*) are those things which we say of a thing in order to delimit what that thing is, such as saying that the substance is a "receptacle" or an "occupier of a void". Both of these 'definitions' or defining limits (recall that *hadd* means both definition and limit) are nothing apart from the reality of the substance. They are separated conceptually, but concretely they refer to one and the same thing. It is in this sense that the definitions are identical with the defined object and are none other than the very self of that object.

[620] What does not remain is the object-as-accidents, while what does remain is the object-as-substance. The reason why what does *not* remain for two moments becomes for us that which *does* remain for more than two moments is that the object-as-accidents and the object-as-substance is objectively one and the same reality. What does not stand on its own and what *does* stand on its own are, concretely, the same.

and the same are *uncertain about a new creation*.[621]

As for the Folk of unveiling, they say that God discloses Himself with every breath, and that the self-disclosure does not repeat, and they see through witnessing that each self-disclosure gives a new creation and takes one away. Its being taken away is selfsame with perishing upon a self-disclosure, while abiding belongs to what another self-disclosure gives.[622] So understand.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Mastery in the Word of Lot

'Mastery' means force. He who is a master is forceful. One says, "I 'mastered' the dough," when one is firm in kneading it. Qays ibn al-Hatim said, describing a thrust:

My hand mastered it and made the slit pour forth
One standing this side of it could see behind it

This means, "With my hand I made it forceful," referring to the thrust. This is spoken of in God's words concerning Lot, upon him be peace, "*O, would that I had power against you, or might take refuge with a forceful support"*.[623] The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "May God have mercy on my brother Lot, who sought refuge in a firm support,"[624] thus pointing out, may God bless him and grant him peace, that he was with God owing to His being Forceful. What Lot meant by *forceful support* was a tribe, and by *O, would that I had power against you* was meant that willpower which is particular to mortal man.[625] The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Since that time," referring to the time when Lot, upon him be peace, said, *or might take refuge with a forceful support*, "no prophet was sent who did not meet with opposition from his people and who was not subsequently protected by his tribe," as was the case with Abu Talib and the

[621] 50:15
[622] According to Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine of renewal through the breaths, each moment of creation is a unique, non-repeating self-disclosure of God. As he mentions later in the Ringstone of Solomon, to say that one self-disclosure is followed by another does not necessarily imply a temporal succession. The breaths of self-disclosure have no duration. Ibn al-'Arabi is not trying to assert that creation consists of discreet moments linked together in the manner of motion picture frames. Rather, he means to show that creation exists in a state of uninterrupted dependence upon the divine Breath, the way that the sound of the human voice depends totally and in a non-temporal way upon the flow of air. The language of perishing (*fana'*) and abiding (*baqa'*) shows that at every moment creation is both nothing in the face of God and also none other than a self-manifestation of God.
[623] 11:80
[624] Bukhari 60:15
[625] I follow Chittick in translating *bashar* as "mortal man". Whereas *insan* evokes the totality of the human state, *bashar* is used in contexts where in English we might say, "A mere man," or, "He is only a man." One can think of it perhaps as the humanity that is common to all men; every man is *bashar*, but very few are truly *insan*.

Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. He said, *O, would that I had power against you*, because he had heard God say, *God is He that created you of weakness*, that is, at root, *then He made after weakness strength*.[626] The strength is accidental by virtue of this 'making', and is thus an accidental strength. *Then after strength He made weakness and gray hairs*. The 'making' was associated with the gray hairs. As for the weakness, this means the return to the origin of his creation, spoken of in His Words, *He that created you of weakness*. He brought him back to that from which He created him, as in His Words, *He will then be brought back to the vilest state of life, then after knowing somewhat, he may know nothing*.[627] It is here mentioned that he shall be brought back to his initial weakness. Weakness controls an old man as it does an infant. The Prophet was not sent until he had lived forty years, which is the time when one begins to suffer from a certain deficiency and weakness.[628]

For this reason he said, *O, would that I had power against you*, which requires an effectual willpower. If you were to say, "What would block him from an effectual willpower, seeing that such is to be found amongst the travelers, who are followers, and since the messengers are more properly possessed of it?" we would say that you have spoken truthfully, but fall short with respect to another aspect of knowledge, which is that knowledge does not leave willpower any disposal.[629] As one's knowledge grows his disposal through willpower diminishes. This is so for two reasons. The first reason is that one realizes the station of slavehood and contemplates the origin of one's own natural creation. The second reason is that he who disposes and that wherein he disposes are one. He does not see anything to which he might direct his willpower, and this prevents him. In this locus of witnessing he sees that his disputant has not deviated from his reality *as it is* in the state of his identity's immutability and the state of his non-existence. Only that which he possesses in the state of non-existence in immutability becomes manifest in existence. He does not go beyond his own reality and does not abandon his path. As for its being referred to as 'disputation', this is only an accidental matter, manifested

[626] 30:54
[627] 16:70
[628] The import of this paragraph is that strength and power do not belong to man essentially. In fact, man's original non-existence is the pinnacle of weakness. It is after being created that man is then made physically strong by God. The Sufis and philosophers have always considered man's outward development to complement and mirror his inward spiritual development. The passions associated with the body grow weaker over time, while the more elevated faculties of the soul grow stronger and stronger. The age of forty is traditionally thought of as the point at which true maturity begins, since the physical passions have diminished while the spiritual faculties have developed.
[629] *Tasarruf*. Chittick translates this word as "free-activity". It refers to the miraculous powers possessed by the prophets and saints, such as being in more than one place at once, or bringing an object into being. The souls of such people are so powerful that through their will they are able to 'dispose' in the world in ways that are beyond the capabilities of ordinary men, by means of their *himmah* or power of will.

by the veil that is found over the eyes of men.[630] It is as God spoke of them, saying, *But most of them know not. They know a manifest part of the life of the lower world, but they are heedless of the Hereafter*.[631] This comes from an inversion, which itself comes from their own words, *Our hearts are enveloped*,[632] that is, they are in a 'wrapping', a covering that veils them from perceiving the affair *as it is*. This, and its like, prevents the knower from disposal in the world.

Shaykh Abu 'Abdallah ibn Qayid said to Shaykh Abu Su'ud bin al-Shibl,[633] "Why do you not engage in disposal?" Abu Su'ud said, "I have left it for the Real to act for me as He so wills," by which he meant the Words of God most high, commanding him to, *take Him as thy Guardian*.[634] A guardian is he who disposes. What is more, we have heard God most high say, *Spend of that over which we have placed you as vicegerents*.[635] Abu Su'ud and the other knowers knew that what they held in their hand was not theirs, and that they were vicegerents over it. Then God said, "This is the affair over which I have made you vicegerent, and over which I have granted you mastery, so make Me and take Me as your Guardian for it." Abu Su'ud obeyed the Command of God, taking Him as his Guardian. How can it be that one who witnesses this should be left with any willpower by which to dispose, since willpower only acts through union, and since, for the possessor of this union, no room remains for what is other than that which is united therein? And this knowledge separates him from this union. Thus the perfect knower manifests his knowledge through the utmost of inability and weakness.[636]

One of the Substitutes[637] said to the Shaykh Abd al-Razzaq,[638] may God be

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[630] The two reasons that Ibn al-'Arabi gives for the lack of disposal are that firstly man realizes he is nothing and secondly that God is everything. In the first case he becomes perfectly submitted to the will of God, and in the second case he sees no field of action to which he might turn his attention, because he sees that everything is as it should be. If the purpose of a miracle is to convince a disputative person of the divine truth, the miracle is superfluous because whether or not the disputant will be a believer is a function of his own immutable identity. More fundamentally, the saint who possesses this power and the domain in which he might exercise this power are the same; both are self-disclosures of the one divine reality.

[631] 30:6-7

[632] 2:88 There are two possibilities for what this inversion (*maqlub*) refers to. It could mean that the disbelievers invert or turn upside down the nature of things so as to deny the reality of a Hereafter. The second possibility is that the inversion refers to the reversal of letters in going from *ghulf* ("enveloped") to *ghafil* ("heedless", mentioned in the previously cited Quranic verse).

[633] A disciple of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, who died in 1145 or 1146. (See *The Self-Disclosure of God*, p. 377)

[634] 73:9 *Wakil* also carries the sense of someone who acts on another's behalf.

[635] 57:7

[636] Evidently the knowledge (*ma'rifah*) mentioned here is the knowledge that one has of one's own nothingness and lack of power, which complements the station of union. In the station of union there is only the Self, hence no disposal is necessary, and in the station of duality the status of total slavehood and submission precludes disposal.

[637] The Substitutes (*abdal*) occupy one of the levels of the invisible spiritual hierarchy, among other rankings such as 'Pegs' (*awtad*), Imams, and of course the Poles (*qutb*).

[638] According to Gilis, a Tunisian disciple of Abu Madyan.

pleased with him, "After giving him greetings, say to Shaykh Abu Madyan,[639] 'O Abu Madyan, why is it that while no thing is difficult for us, and things are difficult for you, that we covet your station while you do not covet ours?'" Now, that was so, although Abu Madyan, may God be pleased with him, was possessed of that station[640] and others besides. We are more perfect than was he as regards the station of incapacity and weakness.[641] So it was, and the Substitute said what he said to him, and it was of the same kind.[642]

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, spoke of this station, commanded by God to do so, saying, *I know not what shall be done with me or with you. I follow naught but what hath been revealed unto me*.[643] The Messenger was governed by what was revealed to him. He had naught else. If it were revealed to him in a definitive way that he should dispose, he would dispose. If it were forbidden he would refrain. If he were given a choice, he would choose to leave off disposal, lest he be deficient in his knowledge.

Abu Su'ud said to some companions of his who trusted in him, "Indeed God has granted me disposal for fifteen years, but I gracefully abstain from it." This is conceited talk. As for us, we do not abstain from it 'gracefully'—this being his abstention by way of preference—but only abstain due to the perfection of knowledge. Knowledge does not demand this by way of choice. When a knower disposes in the world through his willpower, it is under divine command and by compulsion, not by way of choice.

There is no doubt that the station of Messenger requires disposal in order for the message that is brought to be accepted. Therefore, that which would validate him in the sight of his community and his people is manifest in him, in order for God's religion to be made manifest. This is not the case for the saint. Although this is so, the Messenger does not seek it in what is outward, because the Messenger has compassion for his people. He does not wish to exceedingly manifest the argument against them, for indeed therein would be their destruction, and so he leaves them be. The Messenger also knew that if a miraculous occurrence were to appear to the lot of them, there would be those who would believe in it, and there would be those who would know it but disavow it, not allowing their own confirmation of it to appear, out of their own darkness, pride, and envy. There would also be those who would associate it with sorcery and fraud. The messengers knew that only one whose heart is illuminated with the light of faith shall believe, and that an individual who does not see by that light called faith will derive no benefit from the miraculous occurrence.

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[639] A famous north African Sufi master who died 1126.
[640] That is, the station of the Substitutes.
[641] Although it is ambiguous, I am assuming that it is Ibn al-'Arabi speaking of himself here.
[642] That is, he did not engage in disposal for the same reasons mentioned above, possessing perfect knowledge and slavehood.
[643] 46:9

Thus, willpower desists from seeking after miraculous things, since its effect is not universal, neither for the onlooker nor for their hearts.[644] It is as He said regarding that most perfect of messengers and the most truthful and knowledgeable of creation, *Thou guidest not whom thou lovest, but God guideth whomsoever He willeth*.[645] Now, willpower certainly does have an effect, and no one could be more complete, exalted, or stronger in his willpower than the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, but it did not have an effect on the submission of his uncle, Abu Talib. It was in this regard that the aforementioned verse descended. And to this point He said, regarding the Messenger, that only the message was incumbent upon him, and He said, *It is not incumbent upon thee to guide them, but God guideth whomsoever He willeth*,[646] to which he added in the chapter of the Story (*al-Qasas*), *He best knoweth those who are guided*,[647] that is, those who give Him knowledge of their being guided in the state of their non-existence by means of their immutable identities. It has been established that knowledge depends on the known thing. Whosoever is a believer within the immutability of his identity and in the state of his non-existence will become manifest in that form in the state of his existence. God learned from him that he would be such and such, and to this point He said, *He best knoweth those who are guided*. And since He spoke the likes of this, He also said, *The Word is not changed with Me*,[648] for My Word accords with My knowledge concerning My creation. *And I wrong not My slaves*, that is, I did not ordain for them the infidelity that afflicts them, then seek of them something beyond their capacity to give. Nay, I only deal with them in accordance with what I know them to be, and I only know them through what they grant Me from themselves, from what they *are*; if there is any wrong, they are the wrongdoers. Because of this He said, *But it is they who wrong themselves*,[649] and thus it is not God who wronged them. Likewise, We only say to them what our Essence accords Us to say to them, and Our Essence is known to Us *as It is* in Our saying something or not saying it. We only say what We know We shall say. Ours is the Word that comes from Us, and theirs is the obedience—or lack thereof—together with their act of hearing it.[650]

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[644] To show a person a miracle is to present them with a kind of ultimatum. If the heart is not receptive, the miracle may actually steel the resolve of the person away from belief and make him that much more unreceptive to the divine truth. On this point one should recall that in the Quran when the disciples of Christ ask him for a sign from God to set their hearts at rest they are warned of a terrible punishment if, after seeing the Table they ask for, they disbelieve (5:112-115).

[645] 28:56

[646] 2:272

[647] 28:56

[648] 50:29

[649] 9:57

[650] These last few sentences are more unfolding of Ibn al-'Arabi's cardinal principle that knowledge depends upon an object that is known. The object of God's knowledge is His own Essence or Himself. It is His knowledge of His own Names and Qualities that makes up the reality of the immutable identities of things. He must first have knowledge of these possibilities before they can achieve manifested existence. The Word here is *Be!* Recall that the existentiation comes from the side of the

All comes from Us and from them
Received from Us and from them[651]
If they come not from Us
Then no doubt We would come from them[652]

O my friend, realize this Wisdom of Mastery in the Word of Lot, for it is the kernel of knowledge.

The Mystery hath been made clear unto thee
And the affair hath been explained
The even is included in
What one calls the odd[653]

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Ordainment in the Word of Ezra

Know that the decree is God's determination of things, and that God's determination of things accords with His knowledge of them and in them. God knows of things what these objects of knowledge accord Him, which is *what they are* in themselves. Ordainment is none other than the temporalizing of *what things are* in their identity. The decree only determines things through them.[654] This is the essence of the mystery of ordainment, *for the one possessed of a heart, or one who lendeth*

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creature, whose manifestation as a concrete being is part of its very essence. The obedience or disobedience belongs to the creature because it too is none other than something determined by what the immutable identity is.

[651] "All comes from Us," refers to the Names while, "and from them," refers to the identities. "Received from Us," refers to the knowledge that God has of Himself in Himself, while, "and from them," refers to the knowledge God has of creation.

[652] I believe that his second verse is meant to reaffirm the relationship between the Names and the identities. If the Names were derivative of the identities, then the true hierarchy of dependence would be destroyed. If the identities of things did not come from the Names, then it would have to be that the Names somehow come from the identities, which is obviously absurd.

[653] Here the odd and the even can perhaps be understood as the one and the many. All multiplicity is in reality contained in original oneness the same way that two is included in one.

[654] The distinction between *qada'* ("decree") and *qadar* ("ordainment") is one of the major themes in Islamic theology and philosophy. *Qada'* is similar in meaning to *hukm*, or determination/judgment, while *qadar* evokes the sense of one's "lot" and which Chittick renders as "measure" or "measuring out", i.e. the measuring out of one's lot in life. The divine decree is God's determination of or judgment regarding things. Those things which are determined by God are the immutable identities, which are the objects of knowledge upon which God's knowledge of these objects depends, in accord with Ibn al-'Arabi's principle that knowledge depends on the known object. This determination is His knowledge of things in their eternal state of immutability. Ordainment, which is how I've chosen to translate *qadar*, describes the process by which the identities of things manifest in time (not to mention space). Obviously the decree determines what the ordainment will be, since the latter is simply the existentiation of the former.

ear as a witness.[655] *God's is the most convincing argument*.[656]

Now, in reality, the determiner depends on the very object under question—the one it determines—in what that object's essence requires. The determined thing, through that by which it is determined, determines the determiner to determine it by that. Every determiner is itself determined by that through which and by which it determines, regardless of what the determiner is. Come to realize this question, for indeed ordainment is only unknown owing to the intensity of its manifestation. Thus it remains unrecognized, and is often sought after and pursued.[657]

Know that the Messengers, may they receive God's blessings—with respect to their being Messengers, not with respect to their being saints and knowers—occupy a hierarchy as occupied by their communities. The knowledge with which they were sent was possessed by them only in the measure of what that messenger's community needed, nothing more or less. The communities are ranked in excellence, some excelling others. In terms of the knowledge proper to messengerhood, the messengers are ranked in excellence in accordance with the rank of their communities. This is spoken of in His Words, transcendent is He, *Some of those messengers We have favored above others*.[658] Similarly, they also are ranked in excellence—as regards the knowledge and determinations that stem from their essences—in accordance with their preparedness, spoken of in His Words, *We have favored some of the prophets above others*.[659] Of creation God most high said, *God favoreth some of you above others in bounty*.[660] In bounty there is that which is spiritual, such as knowledge, as well as that which is sensorial, such as food. The Real does not cause them to descend *except by a known measure*,[661] which is the rightful due creation yearns for, for indeed, *God granteth everything its creation*,[662] which He causes to descend in the measure He wills. He only wills what he knows,

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[655] 50:37
[656] 6:149
[657] This is similar to the discussion in the Ringstone of Adam where Ibn al-'Arabi spoke about universal qualities being determined by those things that possess them as qualities. The object of some determination 'forces' the determiner to determine in that special way which is required by its (the object's) nature as a receptacle for that determination. If you exercise control over me, I am also exercising power over you insofar you must control me in such a way as to correspond to what I am. In this context it means that God's determination of things depends upon the receptivity or preparedness (*isti'dad*) of those things. God only determines things to be what they are.
[658] 2:223 As Ibn al-'Arabi will point out later, a messenger or prophet is a special kind of saint. His sainthood stems from his own relationship with God, but if he is a messenger then he must be given knowledge that will be adequate to the community to which he is sent. Since the communities themselves occupy a hierarchy and have differing needs, the knowledge given to the messenger *qua* messenger will vary as well.
[659] 17:55 Here Ibn al-'Arabi is saying that as individuals the prophets also are different from one another, each possessing certain strengths in relation to the other prophets. The fact of discerning a different wisdom in each of the prophets in the *Ringstones* indicates that Ibn al-'Arabi sees something special in each of them, although all are perfected saints.
[660] 16:71
[661] 15:21

and determines by it. And as we have said, He only knows what the known thing accords from itself. At root, the temporalization belongs to the known thing, and the Decree, Knowledge, Will, and Wish[663] depend on the ordainment.[664] The mystery of ordainment is a most illustrious knowledge, and God only grants understanding of it to those whom he has distinguished with perfect knowledge. Knowledge of it grants total comfort to he who knows it, and can also grant he who knows it the *grievous punishment*.[665] Thus it grants two opposites. It is because of this that the Real describes Himself as being wrathful and well-pleased, and it is because of this that the Divine Names stand opposite each other. Its[666] reality determines both in absolute existence and qualified existence. It is not possible that there should be anything that is more perfect, stronger, or greater, because it universally judges what traverses down and what does not.[667]

Since the prophets receive their knowledge through none other than special divine revelation, their hearts are not complicated by intellectual reasoning, because they know the insufficiency of the intellect—with respect to its conceptual reasoning—in perceiving things *as they are*. Hearing news, too, falls short of perceiving what can only be obtained through taste. Perfect knowledge only abides in divine self-disclosure and in what the Real unveils in removing the coverings from the eyes of discernment and vision. One will then perceive things—the eternal among them and those which come to be, their non-existence and existence, their impossible, necessary, and contingent—*as they are* in their realities and in their identities.

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[662] 20:50

[663] It is difficult to otherwise translate these words when they appear together. I believe one can understand *mashiyyah* here as universal will, while *iradah* ("wish") is will as it applies to particular things.

[664] Qaysari comments that this "ordainment" (*qadar*) is really a reference to what is ordained/allotted (*maqdur*), which is the immutable identity itself. This is the same point Ibn al-'Arabi makes elsewhere, in that the existentiation of a thing comes from that thing itself when it obeys God's command Be! This temporalization is synonymous with its coming out of immutability into the realm of manifestation.

[665] A reference to the Qur'an, 2:174 and others. Such knowledge grants comfort because one realizes the true reason why things happen to them. However, it can be that what is meant to happen to someone goes against what they would consider pleasurable, and so they suffer on account of it. No doubt for Ibn al-'Arabi this grievous punishment is not primary in the same way that the comfort of this knowledge is, because for him mercy outstrips all things, including the suffering that someone may own as a part of their ordainment.

[666] That is, the mystery of ordainment.

[667] What traverses down (*muta'addi*) refers to that which comes down from the immutable identities to affect their loci of manifestation, while what does not traverse down (*ghayr muta'addi*) refers to properties only in the loci, that is in creation. The mystery of ordainment determines God in the way Ibn al-'Arabi mentioned above, namely that the determined thing determines the determiner to determine it in that through which it determines. God cannot determine an identity to be other than what it is. On the side of creation, ordainment determines what manifestation will be, since all things are an existentiation of an immutable reality in the knowledge of God.

Since the request of Ezra was made in this special way,[668] he experienced censure, as is related in the saying.[669] If he had sought after the unveiling we have mentioned, perhaps there would have been no censure in the matter. The proof of his simplicity of heart, if one follows some interpretations,[670] is spoken of in, *How shall God give life to this now it is dead?*[671] In our view, his manner in saying this, upon him be peace, resembles that of Abraham, upon him be peace, in his saying, *Lord, show me how Thou quickenest the dead*.[672] This called for a response through some act within which the Real could manifest it and which is spoken of in His Words, transcendent is He, *So God made him die a hundred years, then He raised him up.* He then said to him, *And look at the bones, how We shall set them up, and then clothe them with flesh.*[673] He saw how bodies grow with definitive vision; He showed him the how. He had asked about the ordainment which is only known in unveiling things in their state of immutability in their non-existence. He was not given this, for it is reserved for the Divine Awareness.[674] It is thus impossible that any but He should know it, for indeed they[675] are the Keys of the First, that is, the Keys of the Invisible *which none know but He*.[676] It can be that God apprises one of His slaves, as He wills, regarding some of these matters.

And know that they are called 'keys' only in the state of opening; the state of opening is the joining of bringing into being with things. If you wish, you can say that it is when power is brought into connection with the object of power, and none other than God may have a taste of that.[677] In this there is no self-disclosure and no unveiling, because Power and Act belong to God alone, since He is the absolute existence that undergoes no qualification. We have seen that the Real censured him, upon him be peace, over this question regarding ordainment, so we know that it was a request for this awareness. Thus, He sought to be possessed of a power that could be

[668] Referring to 2:259 quoted below, *How shall God give life to this now it is dead?*
[669] This saying is mentioned below, "If thou desistest not, We shall erase thy name from the register of prophethood."
[670] That is to say, some Koran commentators hold that it was not Ezra who is referred to in the Quranic account of the person who speaks these words.
[671] 2:259
[672] 2:260
[673] 2:259
[674] It appear that Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to make a distinction between the experience of bringing the dead to life and the witnessing of it. Ezra was shown this, but for Ibn al-'Arabi the "taste" of bringing power to bear on some object of power, as in the giving of life, is reserved for God alone. For Ibn al-'Arabi this is tantamount to asking to experience how identities in their state of immutability are manifested in the domain of space and time, something which only God can experience but which He can give knowledge of to whom He wills, as was also mentioned in the Ringstone of Seth.
[675] That is, the immutable identities.
[676] 6:59
[677] Here bringing into being (*takwin*) is the same as power being connected to some object of power. Here this refers again to the existentiation of identities from their state of immutability. Because the immutable identities are the source of manifestation, they are referred to as their keys, because they unlock the manifestation of the world.

brought into connection with an object of power, but only the possessor of absolute existence can claim this. He had asked for something that cannot have existence in the taste of a creature, for indeed the 'how' of things is only known through taste.

Now, we spoke of God's revelation to him, namely, "If thou desistest not, We shall erase thy name from the register of prophethood," and it means: I shall take away from you the way of giving news, and grant you things through self-disclosure. Self-disclosure occurs through none other than the preparedness that you *are*, and by means of which the perception through taste takes place. You therefore know that you only perceive as determined by your preparedness. So contemplate this matter which you have sought: when you see it not, you will know that you do not have the preparedness for what you have sought, and that it is reserved for the Divine Essence. You already know that God grants all things their creation; He has not given you this special preparedness, so it is not your creation. If it was your creation, the Real would have granted it to you, the same who said, *He granteth everything its creation*.[678] You are the one who refuses such requests—on your own, not requiring a divine forbiddance. This was God's solicitude for Ezra, upon him be peace. Whosoever knows this, knows it, and whosoever is ignorant of it, is ignorant of it.[679]

Know that sainthood is the encompassing, universal orbit, and this is why it does not end. It is the domain of general prophethood. As for law-giving prophethood and messengerhood, these do come to an end. It was with Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, that it came to an end, for there is no prophet after him, that is, one who gives law or is given law, nor is there a messenger after him, for a messenger gives law. Such talk deals a blow to the Friends of God, for it includes the severance of the taste of perfect and complete slavehood.[680] Its unique name is not applied to Him, for indeed the slave wishes not to associate something with his Master—who is God—in name. God bears neither the name 'prophet' nor 'messenger', but does bear the Name 'the Friend'. He is described using this Name in His Words, *He is the Friend of those who believe*,[681] and also, *He is the Friend, the Praiseworthy*.[682] This Name remains present among the slaves of God both in the lower world and in the Hereafter. With the severance of the function of prophet and

[678] 20:50

[679] This last sentence refers back to Ibn al-'Arabi's explanation of the Quranic verse where he says, "…and it means: I shall take away…" His point here is to reemphasize that sainthood is higher than prophethood when we are considering one person. Prophethood is the way of giving news, while sainthood is that by virtue of which one experiences unveiling. Through unveiling one will know that what they receive or are denied is a function of their own receptivity or preparedness. God cannot grant something which a creature is unable to receive. It is in this sense that the creature, not God, refuses the request.

[680] That is to say, prophethood and messengerhood are solely possessed by creatures. When they come to an end, it is as though there no longer remains any qualities by which the creature claims total slavehood in front of his Lord. The word *wali*, which is translated as saint, is also a Name of God, meaning friend or ally.

[681] 2:257

messenger, no name remains for the slave to possess to the exclusion of the Real. However, God is gentle with His slaves, and left for them the general prophethood that is not law-giving, and also left for them the ability to give law through juridical reasoning—which establishes legal rulings—leaving for them the inheritance of law-giving. The Prophet said, "The men of knowledge are the heirs of the prophets." The inheritance here is none other than their performance of juridical reasoning to arrive at legal rulings and making them law.[683] When you see a prophet speaking of something outside of law-giving, it is by virtue of his being a saint and a knower, and for this reason his station in being a knower is more complete and more perfect than his station in being a part of law or law-giving.[684] If you hear one of the Folk of God say—or if it is related to you about one—that sainthood is higher than prophethood, the person who said means none other than what we have said above. He may say that the saint is higher than the prophet, but he is referring to a single individual. That is, the Messenger, upon him be peace, is more complete by virtue of being a saint than of being a prophet and messenger; it does not mean that the saint, who follows him, is higher than him. The follower can never overtake the one who is followed in that for which he follows him. Were he to overtake him, he would not be a follower, so understand.[685]

The messenger and law-giving prophet take sainthood and knowledge as their recourse. Witness how God ordered him to seek increase in knowledge and not in something else, commanding him with His Words, *And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge*.[686] Now, you to know that the law consists of the responsibility to perform certain acts and to avoid certain acts, and its domain is this world which comes to an end. This is not so with sainthood which, if it were to terminate, would terminate as such, just as the function of messenger terminated as such. Were it to terminate as such, it would no longer have a name; now, the Friend is a Name of God, and it abides. It is possessed by His slaves by way of assimilation, realization, and attachment.[687]

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[682] 42:48

[683] Juridical reasoning (*ijtihad*) is the process by which qualified jurists can arrive at law based upon the existing law given by the Prophet. The embellishment and filling out of the prophet's law is an extension of the Prophet's function, carried out to meet needs that continue after prophethood has ended.

[684] When a prophet speaks on matters pertaining to his function as a prophet, which is associated with law-giving, he does so with that knowledge given to him by God for the purpose of being transmitted to his community. It is the knowledge Ibn al-'Arabi mentioned earlier, which is ranged in a hierarchy according to the needs of the various communities to which the prophets are sent. But the prophet also speaks from his sainthood, by virtue of being a soul to whom the realities of things are unveiled. Within the person of the prophet, this latter knowledge is superior.

[685] This passage can also be worded in terms of "dependence" instead of following (*taba'a*).

[686] 20:114

[687] Prophethood and law-giving only concern this world, which is to say that the injunctions and prohibitions in the divine law cease to apply when this world comes to an end. Sainthood is superior to prophethood because sainthood continues on after this world has perished. The *raison d'etre* of

As for His Words to Ezra "If thou desistest not," that is, from asking about the quiddity of ordainment, "We shall erase thy name from the register of prophethood," it means that the matter shall come to you through unveiling, by means of self-disclosure, and the names 'prophet' and 'messenger' shall vanish from you; His being Friend would remain.[688] Since the context indicates that this address comes as a threat, one who found himself in such circumstances and thus addressed would know that it is a threat to bring to an end some of the special dignities belonging to sainthood in this abode, since the prophethood and messengerhood are special degrees within sainthood, over and above the other degrees contained in sainthood. He knows, then, that he is higher than the saint who is possessed neither of law-giving prophethood nor messengerhood. Someone who finds himself in some other context also called for by prophethood's rank would judge that this is a promise, not a threat. His request would be accepted, upon him be peace, since a prophet is a special kind of saint. Based on the context one knows that it is impossible for a prophet, by virtue of possessing this special dignity *within* sainthood, to venture forth into something God would dislike to have him do, or to attempt something impossible to attain. For the one who finds himself in such a context and is firmly established therein, the divine address, "We shall erase thy name from the register of prophethood," would come to him as a promise, and would be a giving of news indicating the loftiness of another degree that will abide. It is the degree that abides for the prophets and messengers in the Abode of the Hereafter, where no creature of God, neither in Paradise nor in the Fire after mankind has entered those two abodes, is subject to any law.[689]

We have limited ourselves to those who enter those two abodes, Paradise and the Fire, in consideration of what has been prescribed on the Day of Resurrection for those people who lived between revelations, young children, and the insane.[690] They shall be gathered on a single highland so that justice may be established, that there might be punishment for wrongdoing, and that there might be reward for the acts of the Folk of Paradise. When they are gathered on that single highland, isolated from

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prophethood ends with the world, but the reality of sainthood if eternal because *wali* is an everlasting Name of God. As with the other qualities, man becomes *wali* or sanctified by taking on the qualities of God (*al-ittisaf bi-sifat Allah*).

[688] That is, although prophethood and messengerhood pass away, God is eternally the Friend, and hence this quality is forever within man's reach.

[689] I am a bit unclear as to the language of "circumstances" and "context" that Ibn al-'Arabi is using here; the commentaries have not helped me. The important point, however, is that to be erased from the register of prophecy only takes away a special dignity within the office of saint, a dignity which moreover only has significance in this world. Although outwardly the exchange appears to be one where the questioner has transgressed bounds and is being reprimanded by God, in reality a saint of the level of a prophet could never, in the eyes of Ibn al-'Arabi, ask for something which would displease God. The way in which this paragraph explicated this point, however, is not altogether clear.

[690] Ibn al-'Arabi is referring here to those classes of people who are not considered *mukallaf*, or answerable to God in terms of religion. The people who lived between revelations are those who had no prophet sent to them and for whom the previous revelation had disappeared.

the rest of mankind, a prophet who comes from the best of them shall be delegated to them. This prophet who is sent on that Day shall come with a fire that will present itself to them, and he will say to them, "I am the Real's messenger to you." Some among them will attest to it, while others will call it a lie. He will say to them, "Hurl yourselves into this Fire. Whoever obeys me shall be saved and enter the Garden, and whoever disobeys me and contradicts my command shall perish and become one of the Folk of the Fire." Whoever obeys his command and casts himself therein shall be joyous and shall taste the reward for his deeds, and shall find that fire to be cool and peaceful. Whoever disobeys him shall merit the punishment and shall enter the Fire, and shall abide therein on account of his disobedient acts, so that God's justice may be established for His slaves. And likewise with His Words, transcendent is He, *A tribulation was unveiled for them*,[691] which refers to a tremendous thing, one of the matters of the Hereafter. *And they shall be called to prostrate*, which is the burdening with responsibility and the giving of law. There will be those among them who are able and those who are not, and these latter are the ones of which God spoke saying, *And they shall be called to prostrate but they cannot*, just as some slaves were not able to obey the Command of God in this lower world, such as Abu Jahl[692] and others. This is the extent of what remains for the law on the Day of Resurrection in the Hereafter, before the entrance into Paradise and the Fire.[693] That is why we had limited what we mentioned. And praise be to God.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Prophethood in the Word of Jesus

Was it from the water of Mary, or the inbreathing of Gabriel
In the form of a man that came to exist out of clay?
The spirit took on existence in a purified essence[694]
Out of the nature you call Sijjin[695]
That is why he was destined to reside
Therein over a thousand years[696]
A spirit from God, not another, and because of this

[691] 68:42
[692] One of the main antagonists of the Prophet in Makkah.
[693] Until this point Ibn al-'Arabi had been saying that prophethood ends in this world, but this story of the highland is the one exception.
[694] The purified essence or self is either Mary, who was pure and untouched, or is Jesus himself, in which case the verse describes Jesus' spirit entering his body.
[695] A reference to the verses, *No indeed; the Book of libertines is in Sijjin; and what shall teach thee what is Sijjin? A book inscribed.* (83:7-8) The word evokes the sense of imprisonment (*sijn*, "prison"). Here it refers to the corporeal world. As Ibn al-'Arabi goes on to discuss later in this chapter, nature encompasses levels beyond the corporeal.
[696] According to Islamic belief, Jesus was raised to heaven bodily, as was the Prophet in his Nocturnal Ascent (*mi'raj*). At the time of Ibn al-'Arabi, Jesus would have ascended to heaven in his body over a thousand years previously.

Did he give life to the dead and make birds from clay
That his relationship to his Lord would hold true
And by which he would affect the high and the lowly
God purified him bodily, and made him untouched in spirit
And made him a likeness of bringing into being[697]

Know that one of the qualities particular to spirits is that they do not tread upon a thing without giving life to that thing. Life then flows within it. For this reason the Samiri took in hand some of the traces left by the messenger—who was Gabriel, upon him be peace, the spirit. The Samiri had knowledge of this matter. Since he knew it was Gabriel, he knew that life flowed in whatever he had tread upon.[698] So, he took in hand some of the traces left by the messenger, a handful or with his fingertips, and cast it into the calf,[699] which then lowed, since the sound of a cow is that of lowing. Had he made it another form, the name of the sound proper to that form would have been attributed to it—for example the braying of a camel, the bleating of rams and sheep, or the voice, words, and discourse of man.

That measure of life flowing in things is called *lahut*, and *nasut*[700] is the locus where that spirit resides. *Nasut* called spirit by virtue of what resides in it. When the *trusted spirit*[701]—that is, Gabriel—appeared to Mary, upon them both be peace, as *a man without fault*,[702] she imagined that he was a man intent on lying with her, so she sought refuge from him in God with all she had, knowing as she did that such a thing

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[697] This likeness is either that of bringing into being or being brought into being, both of which can translate *takwin*. In the first case Jesus' giving life to the dead is a symbol or extension of God as the Giver of Life, whereas in the second case Jesus is like Adam, who had no earthly father. In the Quran Jesus is likened to Adam in the words, *Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in God's sight, is as Adam's likeness; He created him of dust, then He said unto him, 'Be,' and he was.* (3:59)

[698] In Islamic cosmology angels are the life-giving aspect of things. The world of spirits or the Spirit is none other than the world of angels or angelic powers. Angels are all aspects of universal consciousness and life which direct and organize the natural world. Within man himself, it can be said that his most inward spirit and life is his angelic half. The life-directing consciousness of animal, plants, and even minerals are their angels. The beings of the world are arranged in a hierarchy, and to each of them corresponds an aspect or dimension of the world of the spirit, i.e. an angel. According to the passage, Gabriel, as an archangel, is a central and encompassing aspect of the spirit. When he takes on form in order to interact in the world, he infuses whatever he touches with a measure of life it would not have possessed otherwise.

[699] A reference to Qur'an 20:96

[700] The words *lahut* and *nasut* refer to broad levels of reality, and are similar in form to words such as *jabarut*, *malakut*. *Lahut* is derived from *ilah*, or "divinity", and *nasut* is derived from *insan*, or "man". There is also the level of *hahut*, which refers to the Divine Self and comes from *huwa*, or "He". In this passage *lahut* and *nasut* are meant to convey the two poles of body and spirit. In his situation in the world man is characterized by his being bodily, while God is always the spirit of spirits. *Nasut* can be called spirit when it vehicles life, and all life if God's Life. The *nasut* is the receptacle, while the *lahut* is the content.

[701] 26:193

[702] 19:17

was forbidden. She attained complete presence with God, which[703] is the spirit and meaning. Had he breathed into her at that moment, in that state, Jesus would have emerged such that no one could bear the sullenness of his character, which would have stemmed from the state of his mother. When he said to her, *I am but a messenger come from thy Lord*, having come, *to give thee a boy most pure*,[704] she found expansion after contraction, and became glad. At that moment he inbreathed Jesus.[705] Gabriel conveyed the Word of God to Mary just as the Messenger conveyed the Word of God to his community. This is spoken of in His Words, *His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him*.[706]

Desire flowed in Mary.[707] The body of Jesus was created from the real water of Mary and the imaginational$_w$ water of Gabriel.[708] Moisture flowed within that breath, for the breath of an animal body is moist due to what is contained therein of

[703] That is, the total presence with God. Her fear of a man attempting to lie with her brought her into a state of total consciousness of God. It is this kind of presence with God which Ibn al-'Arabi refers to as the spirit of formless essences. With regard to form (*surah*), formless-essence (*ma'na*) is spirit. Thus, presence with God is the spirit of the formless-essences of forms.

[704] 19:19

[705] Mary had attained presence with God by way of contraction or fear. In other words, her consciousness of God at that moment was dominated by rigor as opposed to gentleness. Ibn al-'Arabi unfolds his argument according to the belief that the state of the mother, among other things, has a decisive impact on the character of the child.

[706] 4:171.

[707] Qaysari comments that desire has a 'meaning' (*ma'nawi*) spirit, which is Essence's love for the existentiation of the world. When God willed to existentiate Jesus, it caused this hidden 'desire' in Mary to be awakened. Now, Ibn al-'Arabi does use the word *shahwah*, which is ordinarily associated more with sensual desires. Qashani goes so far as to speak of this as the desire of a woman for sexual union. Qashani, in keeping with the general Islamic perspective, does not attach any negative connotations to sexual desire, which can be spiritualized as can all other lawful actions in the body. It was only after Mary was told that this encounter was ordained by God that this 'desire' arose. *Shahwah* can also be translated as "passion". It could thus be said that Mary experienced a holy passion at the time of the inbreathing of Gabriel, in the same way that her son would experience a holy anger at the time, for example, of his turning over the tables of the money-changers in the temple. This attribution of passion to Mary would be unacceptable to the Christian interpretation of this event, but in the Islamic perspective nothing is lost by discerning the heavenly dimension of sexual desire in Mary at the time of the angel's visit. It is in keeping with Ibn al-'Arabi's theme that the birth of Jesus was a *human* birth.

[708] Perhaps imaginational (*mutawahham*) could be translated, "As if water," meaning that it wasn't water (referring to reproductive fluids) in the ordinary sense, but was "as if" (*quasi*) it were water. I use "imaginational" to translate *mutawahham* as well as *khayali* because Ibn al-'Arabi often uses the terms *khayal* and *wahm* synonymously. The import of the passage is that it is imagined to be water. Qaysari offers two possibilities. First, Jesus is a product of the two waters together. Second, the water of Gabriel is a condition for the actualization of a child from the water of Mary. Qaysari seems to favor this second interpretation, since it represents a possibility between no parents (Adam) and two parents (ordinary man). This interpretation, however, does not seem to be borne out by the last sentence of this paragraph where Ibn al-'Arabi mentions existentiation in the "usual way". Qaysari explains this by reverting to the state of the mother at conception. Gabriel had to appear in the form of a man so that Jesus would be conceived as a man. He suggests that if she had been witness to another form at that decisive moment, Jesus would have been conceived differently and would have been born with a different form.

the pillar[709] of water. Thus Jesus was existentiated from real water and from imaginational$_w$ water, and emerged in the form of a mortal man because of his mother and because of Gabriel's appearance in the form of a mortal man, so that existentiation would take place for the species of man in only the usual way.

Jesus emerged and quickened the dead, for he was the Spirit of God. The quickening was that of God, while the inbreathing belonged to Jesus, just as the inbreathing belonged to Gabriel while the Word was God's. Jesus' quickening of the dead was a real quickening with respect to what manifested from his inbreathing, as was the case when he became manifest out of the form of his mother. However, his quickening was also imaginational$_w$ with respect to its coming from him, for it was naught but God's. He brought them together by virtue of the reality he was created to be.[710] As we have said, he was created from imaginational$_w$ water and real water, so quickening is attributed to him in a real way from one point of view and in an imaginational$_w$ way from another.

It is said of him regarding this real way, *And he quickeneth the dead*,[711] while it is said of him regarding the imaginational$_w$ way, *He breathed into it, and it became a bird by the leave of God*.[712] The action belonging to the prepositional phrase[713] is *it became* and not His Words *he breathed*, or it can be that the action is *he breathed*, in which case it became a bird by virtue of his corporeal, sensorial form. Such is also the case with, *And thou healed the blind and the leper*, and all else that is attributed to him and to *the leave of God*, as well as to the leave alluded to in His Words such as, *By My leave*, and, *By the leave of God*. If the prepositional phrase is attached to *he breathed*, then the one who breathes is given leave in breathing, and the bird comes to be because of the one who breathes by the leave of God. If the one who breathes does so without leave, then it is the bird's being brought into being that takes place by the leave of God, in which case the action is *it became*.[714]

If it were not for the fact that there is imagination$_w$ and true reality in the matter, this form would not allow of these two aspects.[715] Nay, it has these two

[709] Another name for the four elements.
[710] That is to say, Jesus brought together real bringing to life and imaginational bringing to life, in the sense that his actions did bring creatures back to life in a real way, but from the point of view of God this life-giving was imaginary, because only God can bring the dead to life.
[711] 42:9
[712] 5:110
[713] This phrase being *by the leave of God*
[714] This is an explication of the previous paragraph's point regarding true quickening and imaginational quickening. If, on the one hand, God gives his permission for Jesus to breathe, then the clay figure becoming a bird is linked directly to the breathing, in which case the quickening is a true quickening on the part of Jesus. However, if on the other hand God permits it to become a bird when Jesus breathes, Jesus' quickening is imaginational, since the act of giving life is linked directly to God's leave as opposed to Jesus' act of breathing into it.
[715] That is, the form of Jesus could not allow of the two aspects of true quickening and imaginational quickening if not for the fact that his very existentiation comprised these two aspects of real and imaginational.

aspects because it is so accorded by the makeup of Jesus. Jesus emerged out of humility, so much so that it is prescribed for his community that, *They shall pay the tax, humbling themselves*,[716] and that when one amongst them is struck on the cheek that they should offer the other to the one who struck him and not rise up against him or seek revenge against him. This aspect stems from his mother, for lowliness belongs to woman, as does humility, for she is below man both legally and physically. Any power he possessed to give life or to heal came from the aspect of Gabriel's breath into the form of a mortal. Jesus gave life to the dead in the form of a mortal man. Had Gabriel not come in the form of a mortal man, but in another form from among the other elemental beings—animal, vegetable, or mineral—Jesus would not have given life until he took on that form and became manifest in it. Moreover, had Gabriel come in his luminous form, which lies outside of the elements and pillars (and since he does not come out of his nature),[717] Jesus would not have given life to the dead until after he became manifest in that natural, luminous non-elemental form together with the form of mortal man which came from the side of his mother.[718] It used to be said upon his quickening of the dead, "It is he, it is not he." Bewilderment occurred when one looked upon him, as will happen for any intelligent being in his discursive reasoning upon seeing an individual mortal give life to the dead, since it is a special prerogative of the Divine to give life to reason, though it is not in the case of animals.[719] The onlooker is left bewildered when he sees divine effects coming from a mortal man.

This has led some to hold the position of the incarnation, and to hold, by virtue of the dead he brought to life, that he is God. For this reason they have been associated with disbelief, which is a covering,[720] for they cover God, who gives life to the dead, with the mortal form of Jesus. He, most high, said, *They disbelieve, those who say that God is Christ the son of Mary*.[721] They bring together both error and

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[716] 9:29

[717] That is, even though Gabriel is represented in human form, this does not mean that he ceases to be the luminous spirit above the world of the elements. If it did, the very notion of representation would lose its meaning.

[718] Again, the form of the angel is decisive when it comes to the form in which Jesus will emerge. Since the giving of life comes from the side of the angel, according to Ibn al-'Arabi's argument Jesus must be in the form of that which endowed him with the ability to give life in order to actually do so. Though I am not entirely clear about the reason, it seems reasonable to me that Ibn al-'Arabi is making an argument based on the relationship between form and that form's formless essence. The form is the form of man, and the formless essence is the power of giving life. Now, if the power of giving life is accorded by a form other than the form of man, it would be necessary for that form to be actualized by Jesus in order for that formless essence of live-giving to be vehicled. Thus, the form in which Jesus appears in order to give life depends upon the form in which Gabriel appeared in order to give him this power.

[719] That is, to quicken a being as well as his faculty of *nutq* (or reason, literally "speech"), as opposed to simply animating a body, which, as Qaysari comments, can be achieved through various types of 'magic'.

[720] Disbelief (*kufr*) carries the meaning of "covering" (*sitr*).

[721] 5:17

disbelief when they say all of these words, because they do not do so in saying that he is God, nor in saying that he is the son of Mary. With respect to the dead being brought to life, they turned from God—while enclosing Him—to a *nasut* mortal form with their words, "the son of Mary," for indeed he was the son of Mary.[722] One who hears this might imagine that they attribute divinity to the form, making it identical with the form, but this is not what they do. Rather, they begin by placing the Divine Selfhood in the mortal form that is the son of Mary, thus making a distinction between the form and the object of their judgment.[723] Yet, they make the form identical with the object of their judgment.[724] Remember the case of Gabriel, who, while in the form of a mortal man, did not breathe and then *did* breathe, a distinction being made between the form and the breathing. The breath came from that form, which was when the breath was not; thus the breath is not part of its essential definition.[725]

Differences of opinion arose among the sects as to what Jesus was. There are those who argue from his mortal, human form, saying that he is the son of Mary. There are those who argue from the represented mortal nature and associate him with Gabriel. Some make an argument based on the quickening of the dead which became manifest from him, and associate him with God through the aspect of spirit, saying that he is the Spirit of God, meaning that by him life manifests from those in whom he breathes. Sometimes God is imagined$_w$ to be in him, sometimes the angel is imagined$_w$ to be in him, and sometimes the human and mortal aspects are imagined$_w$ to be in him. For the proponents of these positions, he will be as determined by what predominates over them: he is the Word of God, and he is the Spirit of God, and he is the slave of God. This[726] is the case for no other in the domain of sensorial form. Indeed, all individuals are related to their form-possessing father, and not to one who breathed his spirit while in the form of a mortal man. When God fashioned the body of man, spoken of in His Saying, *And when We fashioned him*,[727] He breathed into him, transcendent is He, of His Spirit. Thus the spirit, as far as his being and his

[722] To say Christ is God is not incorrect, since all things are manifestations of the Self, and there is no argument that Jesus was the son of Mary. For Ibn al-'Arabi the error is not in making any of these two statements separately, but in joining them together with the effect of producing an unacceptable specificity, i.e. that God is confined to that one form.

[723] I translate *hukm* as "object of their judgment" instead of determination because both Qaysari and Qashani gloss *hukm* here to mean *mahkum 'alayh*, 'that which is judged or determined'. In this case, the *mahkum 'alayh* is the Divine Selfhood, which is made to reside (is judged to be) in the mortal form of Jesus.

[724] That is, while starting off differentiating between the Divine Essence and the form of Jesus, they nevertheless declare identity in saying that God is Christ the son of Mary.

[725] The breathing carried out by the form that Gabriel assumed was not essential to that form, since it was there for a time without that breathing. This is used to illustrate that point that the form of Jesus could not be an essential aspect of the Divine Selfhood, since the Divine Selfhood was before that form ever existed.

[726] That is, this kind of disagreement.

[727] 15:29

identity are concerned, is associated with Him, transcendent is He. Jesus was not so, for the inbreathing of the spirit was incorporated into the fashioning of his body and mortal form. As we have already mentioned, this was the case for no other.[728]

All existent things are the inexhaustible Words of God; all come from *Be!*, and *Be!* is a Word of God. Is the Word related to God with respect to what He *is*, its quiddity thus being unknown, or does He descend, transcendent is He, into the form of the one who says, *Be!*, the utterance *Be!* being the reality of that form into which He descends and in which He is manifest? Some knowers hold the first view, and some the other, while others experience bewilderment in the matter and know not.[729] This matter can only be known through taste, as when Abu Yazid breathed into an ant he had killed, giving it life. Upon that he knew who breathed, and so breathed.[730] He was Christic[731] in his locus of witnessing.

As for the spiritual$_m$ quickening that takes place through knowledge, this is the divine, everlasting, exalted and luminous life of which God spoke saying, *Who was dead, and we gave him life, and appointed him a light to walk among the people*.[732] Whoso gives life to a dead soul with the life of knowledge, in a special matter connected to one's knowledge of God, does so possessing *a light to walk among the people*, that is, amidst their outward appearances in form.[733]

If not for Him, and if not for us
What is would not yet be
We worship truly
And indeed God is our Master
And we are identical with Him
So know, when you say 'man'
Do not veil using 'man'
For He hath given thee a proof[734]

[728] The difference spoken of here is that for all other men the formation of the body preceded the inbreathing of the spirit, whereas in the case of Jesus the in breathing of the spirit was part of the formation of his body.

[729] If the divine fiat is considered as part of the divine nature, then it would be unknowable, since the divine nature in itself is not knowable. However, *Be!* can also be considered as whatever gives existence to something else in the world of multiplicity. In this latter respect, all real causes can be seen as manifestation or expressions of the original *Be!* This is especially so in the case of bringing the dead back to life, which is the main subject of the present discussion.

[730] That is, he knew that it was not he but God who gave it life.

[731] *'Isawi*, meaning that he had a spiritual affinity with the special sainthood of Christ.

[732] 6:122

[733] For Ibn al-'Arabi this is a more exalted kind of life-giving, because to give life to a soul's knowledge of God is to bestow upon it its salvation. The Quran speaks of those people whose spiritual presence is a light by which the hearts of others are illuminated. Such people are not disembodied spirits, but live and interact in this world of appearance and form.

[734] That is, do not think that 'man' exhausts the reality to which you are referring, because the Divine Saying has told us that God is the hearing, sight, etc… of that thing.

Be thou the Real or be thou creation
Thou wilt be, through God, All-Merciful
Feed thou this creation of His
And be spirit and bounty[735]
We accord Him that by which He
Appears in us, and He accords us
And the matter becomes divided up into
What is His, and what is ours
He who knoweth my heart gave it life
When he gave us life
In Him we were beings,
Identities, and moments
'Tis not perpetual in us
But only sometimes[736]

Something that points to what we have spoken of, concerning the matter of the spiritual breath together with the form of elemental mortal man, is that the Real described Himself as possessing the *Breath of the All-Merciful*. For everything described by some quality, it must be that everything that everything entailed that quality follow that quality, and you already know that the breath of a breather is what is entailed by him. That is why the Divine Breath receives the forms of the world, being to them like the hylic substance, and is none other than nature itself.[737] The elements are one of the forms of nature. That which is above the elements and that which it begets—the exalted spirits above the seven heavens—are also forms of nature. As for the seven heavens and their identities, they are elemental, and consist

[735] Man, as the vicegerent of God, is the spiritual sustenance of the world when he fulfills his function.
[736] That is, the giving of life to the heart is not a constant thing, but happens to different people at different times with varying intensity.
[737] Ibn al-'Arabi also makes an identification between nature and the Breath of the All-Merciful in the Ringstone of Muhammad. As in most philosophy, nature is quite slippery when it comes to defining it, and it is no different in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi so far as I can tell. As Qaysari understands this passage, nature is the first self-identification (*ta'ayyun*) entailed by the Breath of the All-Merciful, in the same way that God of the Names and Qualities is the first self-identification entailed by God the Self. It is through this initial self-identification of the Breath (nature) that further self-identifications (the words of God, i.e. existent things) come to be. Recall that the Breath's first function is to 'relieve' the Divine Names of their state of non-manifestation and their non-determination of things. According to this account nature represents that stage of the unfolding of the Breath which introduces the possibility of opposition between things, of activity and affection, and of correlative properties such as hot, cold, dry, and moist, which themselves lead to the formation of the elements.

Here an analogy is being made to breath as we usually understand it, which on this account entails sound and therefore letters and words. In the same way the divine Breath entails the forms of the world, these forms being none other than the words of God. God "speaks" world. The "hylic substance" (*al-jawhar al-hayulani*) is nature, which is envisaged as a substance that courses through all things from the spiritual to the corporeal, and is the principle of opposition between things.

of the smoke of the elements, which is begotten of those elements.[738] The angels that are brought into being from each heaven come from them, and so they are 'elementals' while those who are above them are 'naturals'.[739] For this reason God described them as being disputatious—I refer here to the supreme assembly[740]—for nature consists of opposition, and the opposition between the Divine Names, which are relationships, is only granted by the Breath. Do you not see how the Essence, which lies outside of this determination,[741] is narrated to us as being *Beyond Need of the worlds*?[742] For this reason the world was brought out in the form of that who created it, and which is none other than the Divine Breath.[743] By virtue of the heat therein,[744] it rises. By virtue of the coldness and humidity therein, it descends. By virtue of the dryness therein it stays fixed and does not quake. Sedimentation is proper to coldness and humidity. Do you not see that when a physician wishes to deliver medicine to someone, he looks at his urine in a bottle, and that when he sees sedimentation he knows that the maturation is complete, and so delivers the medicine to accelerate the good progress? The sedimentation takes place through none other than its natural humidity and coldness.

The clay of this human person was kneaded by His two Hands, which stand opposite one another even though both His hands are right.[745] There is no hiddenness

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[738] I understand "elemental" as being a subset of "natural", since the elements are forms of nature. The point here is that the angels above the realm of the heavens and the elements are still in the realm of nature.

[739] These angels are not pure spirits in the ordinary sense, that is, unmattered pure intellects. Rather, the angels or spirits of the heavens are their "imprintable natures" (*nufus muntabi'ah*) which is to say that they are at the level of souls and not spirits properly speaking. That is why they are spoken of as coming into being from the heavens, which would be a strange thing to say if it was a pure spirit. The commentators tell us that this cosmology of the heavens was prevalent among many Sufis, and was the position of the Illuminationists (*al-ishraqiyun*) as well Islamic theosophers (*al-hukama' al-islamiyiin*).

[740] The supreme assembly (*al-mala' al-a'la*) refers to the angels, and this sentence is suggestive of the "disputation" that took place around the creation of Adam. On the supreme assembly (translated as supreme plenum by Chittick) see *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 67-68.

[741] That is, of opposition. Although they are Names of a single Named, the essence or what-it-is of each Name carries an inherent opposition to the what-it-is of another Name, such as the Giver of Life and the Giver of Death. The angels, manifesting Divine Qualities, cannot help but be in a kind of "dispute" with one another. This opposition occurs because of, and not despite, their inability to disobey God. The Breath provides a domain wherein these qualities can come out and be separated from one another, and as the Breath unfolds further and further the opposition and mutual exclusion increases.

[742] 3:97

[743] The pronoun used is *man* (who, whom) as opposed to *ma* (that, what) in "that who created it" which implies something personal as opposed to impersonal. Here the Divine Breath is seen as being none other than an aspect of God, associated as it is with the name *al-Rahman*, the All-Merciful. Otherwise it would be strange to think of the Divine Breath as a "who".

[744] That is, in the breath. Ibn al-'Arabi uses this medical example to illustrate that the principles of opposition in the world—hot, cold, moist, dry—have their origin in the Breath of God. Even the physical qualities of things are unfoldings of the Divine Qualities.

[745] In the Islamic tradition there is a certain superiority associated with the right. Children are encouraged to eat with their right hands, and actions involving ritually unclean things are usually performed with the left hand. At a metaphysical level, to say that both of God's hands are right hands

in the difference between the two of them, even though it only consists in there being two of them, that is, being two Hands. Nothing can affect nature except that which has a correspondence with it, and nature consists of opposition, so He used two Hands.[746] Because He existentiated him with two Hands, He called him mortal, owing to the contact[747]—in a manner befitting the Divine—of the two Hands which are attributed to Him. He made this part of His solicitude for this species of man, and said to the one who refused to prostrate to him, *What prevented thee to bow thyself before what I created with My two Hands? Hast thou waxed proud*, before one like you, that is, elemental, *or art thou one of the exalted ones?*[748] that is, exalted above the elements, for you are not so.[749] What is meant by exalted ones are those who are transcendent, in their essences, above being elemental in their luminous makeup, though they are 'natural'.[750] Man is only superior to other elemental species due to his being a mortal[751] made of clay. He is superior to the species created from the elements without that contact. Man is at a degree above the angels of the earth and heavens, although the exalted angels are better than the human species, according to Divine Writ.[752] Let he who desires to know the Divine Breath know the world, for indeed whoso knoweth himself knoweth his Lord who manifests therein. That is to say, the world becomes manifest in the Breath of the All-Merciful which God breathes for the Divine Names, which find it from out of the absence of their effects' manifestation. He bestowed upon Himself through what He existentiated by His Breath. The Breath's first effect takes place *in divinis*, and then the affair keeps descending through the universal breathing to the end of what exists.[753]

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serves to jar the imagination from an easy anthropomorphism. Even logically it is absurd to say that both are right hands if we are thinking only spatially; one would inevitable be rightmost and hence the other would be left of it. The purpose is to take advantage of the positive symbolism of "hand" without the corresponding limitations.

[746] It is easy to see that these two Hands refer to the Qualities of Rigor and those of Gentleness, or Majesty (*jalal*) and Beauty (*jamal*).

[747] "Mortal" (*bashar*) and "contact" (*mubashirah*) are related by the root b-sh-r.

[748] 38:75

[749] *And He created the jinn of a smokeless fire*. (55:15) *...So they bowed themselves, save Iblis; he was one of the jinn, and committed ungodliness against his Lord's command*. (18:50) Due to his connection with fire, Satan could not be above the elements as the angels are.

[750] Recall what was said above regarding the status of being 'natural'. The angels are above the elements, but they are still within the domain of opposition.

[751] Recall that this is meant to evoke the "contact" of God's Hands with man.

[752] This is only so if one considers the human species as a whole, which comprises those who are even considered below the animals. The angels are always exalted, but they fall short of the completeness of Perfect Man, as was discussed in detail in the Ringstone of Adam. The Divine Writ to which he refers is the aforementioned verse (38:75). Also, Qaysari quotes from the *Futuhat* the following, "I saw the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, and I asked him, 'Which is superior, man or the angels?' He said, 'I have heard God say, 'Whoso remembereth me within himself I remember Him in Myself, and whoso remembereth me in an assembly, I remember him in an assembly better than them, who are the exalted ones."

[753] This is related to the tension (*karb*) that is relieved by the Divine Breath, spoken of in the Ringstone of Hud. God first breathes for Himself, that is, in order for His Names and Qualities to have an object

All things are in that very Breath
Like light in the darkness before dawn
Knowledge by demonstration is in
The day's end for one who slumbers
And sees what we have said
In a vision showing the Breath
Which relieves him of all the sadness
Of his reciting He frowned[754]
He discloses Himself to the one
Who comes searching out the firebrand
He sees it as fire, but it is a light
For kings and centurions[755]
It you understand my words
You will know that you are needful
Had he been seeking after other than that
He would have seen Him in it without being turning away[756]

When the Real confronted this Christic word[757] in the station of *That we may know*[758]—and He does know—He asked it whether what had been attributed to it was true or not, although he already knew whether or not this thing had happened. He said, *Didst thou say unto men, "Take me and my mother as divinities apart from God?"*'[759] Now, it is necessary to have *adab* in responding to this questioner, for, since He disclosed Himself to him in this station and in this form, it demands wisdom

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by which to manifest. The breath continues to pour out and results in everything that exists, even the physical world.

[754] *'Abasa*, the title of the eightieth chapter of the Qur'an. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is speaking about the intellectual vision of a man who has a conceptual grasp of the truth. His knowledge is not like the dawn but like the end of the day, for he is like one asleep. Even so, his understanding is a kind of vision of the way things truly are, and this understanding relieves him of any cause of gloom or melancholy.

[755] The person of conceptual understanding can search out the fire of true knowledge and God may disclose Himself to such a seeker. He seeks out the fire but it is actually a light, which is to say that he seeks it to the extent that he understands. His search was for fire, but he finds something better.

[756] Referring here to Moses, to whose search for the firebrand the intellectual seeker's quest is likened. If he had sought other than fire, he still would have seen God therein, since he was a sincere seeker and God can be found in any form.

[757] *'Mary, God gives thee good tidings of a Word* (*kalimah*) *from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary…'* (3:39)

[758] 47:3, which fully reads, *And We shall assuredly try you until We know those of you who struggle and are steadfast…*

[759] 5:116

of response, in separation while in union itself.[760] He spoke to Him, beginning with the assertion of incomparability, *"To Thee be glory!"* He delimited it with the pronoun, which necessitates there being an encounter as well as an address.[761] *"It is not mine,"* insofar as I am mine and not Thine, "*to say what I have no right to*," that is, it is required neither by my selfhood nor my essence.[762] "*If I indeed said it, Thou knowest it,"* for Thou art the tongue by which I speak. Recall that the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, told us in the divine narration that, "I will be his tongue by which he speaketh." He thus made His Selfhood the very tongue of the speaker, and related the speech to His slave. Then the righteous slave finished his response by saying, "*Thou knowest what is in my soul*—the speaker is the Real—*and I know not what is within it."* He[763] denied knowledge to the Jesus' selfhood as such, though not with respect to his being a speaker or producer of effects.[764] "*Thou Thyself,"*[765] using distinction and emphasis, reinforcing the explanation and relying upon it, since only God knows the invisible.[766] He divided and unified, made one and made many, widened and constricted,[767] and then said, completing his response, "*I spoke not to them except what Thou didst command me."* He first used negation, indicating that he was not. Then he responded to His words, having *adab* with the Questioner. Had he not done so one could have attributed ignorance of the realities to him, and far be it from him that this should be so. He said, *except what Thou didst command me*, that is, Thou speakest with my tongue, and Thou *art* my tongue. Contemplate how subtle and precise is this divine, spiritual news-giving! *Worship God*,[768] using the Name 'God' [*Allah*] because of the diversity of slaves and because of the diversity of laws. He did not specify a particular Name to the exclusion of another Name. Rather, he used the Name that gathers them all together. Then he said, *My Lord and your Lord*. It is known that His relationship to a given existent

[760] That is to say, as a prophet Jesus had achieved the station of union (*jam'*), but the fact that it was a dialogue implies a separation (*tafriqah*). True union encompasses separation without absolutely negating it.
[761] The pronoun is *Thee*, implying a duality.
[762] Each creature can be seen in itself or as a self-disclosure of God. Ibn al-'Arabi is making a distinction between Jesus' own "I" in itself on the one hand and this "I" as none other than the Divine "I" on the other.
[763] "He" refers to the Real, in keeping with the parenthetical statement Ibn al-'Arabi inserted in his quotation of the previous Quranic verse, "—the speaker is the Real—".
[764] Again, from one point of view Jesus' selfhood is extinguished in the Divine Selfhood, though from another point of view it is what it is and one can say, "Jesus said," or, "Jesus produced such and such an effect."
[765] This fully reads, *Thou Thyself knowest the invisible*…(5:117)
[766] The distinction is that he should use the 2nd person, while the emphasis is that he should follow it with *Thyself*. The explanation is Jesus' statements that place all knowledge and power in God's hands. The soul is part of the invisible world which only God truly knows.
[767] That is, in what he said and in what he was Jesus acknowledged both the point of view of his nothingness and of his somethingness in the face of the divine reality.
[768] The verse reads, *"I spoke not to them except what Thou didst command me: 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'"*

through His being Lord is not identical with the relationship He has with another, which is why he said, *My Lord and your Lord*, indicating both the speaker and those addressed.[769]

...Except what Thou didst command me, thus establishing his soul as being subject to command. This is none other than his slavehood, since one is not commanded unless it is conceivable that he will obey, even if he does not do so. Now, the command descends as determined by hierarchy, so whoever manifests in some level will be colored by what is accorded by the reality of that level. The level of the commanded has a determination manifesting in everything commanded, while the level of the Command has a determination appearing in every command.[770] The Real says, *Establish the Prayer*,[771] and is the one who commands, the one charged with responsibility, and the one commanded. The slave says, *My Lord, forgive me*,[772] and is the one who commands while the Real is the one who is commanded. What the Real seeks of the slave through His Command is the very thing the slave seeks of the Real through his command.[773] For this reason every supplication is answered. This must be so, even though it may be delayed, just as some of those who are burdened with responsibility, addressed to stand and establish the Prayer, do not pray at that time but delay their compliance and pray at another time, though they were capable of doing so. There must needs be an answer, if only through intention.[774]

"*I was a witness over them, while I remained among them,"* not saying over myself *with* them as when he said, "*My Lord and thy Lord,"* for indeed the prophets are witnesses over their communities while they remain among them. "*When Thou didst take me to Thyself,"* that is, Thou didst raise me to Thyself, veiling them from me and me from them, "*Thou wast Thyself the watcher over them,"* not in my

[769] God is Lord to each and every existent in a different way, which is why Jesus used the all-encompassing Name Allah, and which is also why he said "my Lord and your Lord" and not "our Lord".

[770] I believe what Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to establish here is that there is a web of commanding beings and commanded beings, and the nature of the command will be different according to mode of reality in which it occurs. Another way of stating this is that when one views reality through the prism of commands one will find a commanding pole and a commanded pole. As a slave of God, Jesus manifests as a commanded being, although as Perfect Man and Word of God he also has a commanding aspect. "Level" here is used here in the sense of "function". "Commanding" and "being commanded" are realities that have their origin in divine principles, and this relationship unfolds and manifests itself throughout the cosmos as all the existent relationships of commander and commanded.

[771] 2:43

[772] 23:18

[773] The "command" of the slave is his prayer or supplication to God. The mystery is that prayer itself is something willed by God. In Sufism the entreaties of man are themselves results of divine grace. This recalls what Ibn al-'Arabi said in the Ringstone of Noah, where calling upon God is labeled a "deception" since God is the beginning and end of all prayer. Ibn al-'Arabi discusses this near question the end of the current chapter.

[774] That is, God may delay the response to one's supplication, but that does not mean the response is not coming. It is to the sincere expression of needfulness that God responds, which does not always correspond with the specific thing asked for.

matter,[775] but in their matter when Thou wast their sight, making necessary this watchfulness. Man's witnessing of himself is the Real's witnessing of him. He used the Name the Watcher because he used "witness" for himself, and wished to distinguish between himself and his Lord, in order for it to be known that he was what he was due to his being a slave, and that the Real is the Real due to His being Lord over him. Therefore he used "witness" for himself and "Watcher" for the Real. He placed them before himself, saying, "*I was over them as a witness while I remained among them,"* showing *adab* and preferring them to come first, but placed them after the Real when it came to Him, saying, *the Watcher over them*, since the Lord deserves precedence of degree. Then he showed that the Real, the Watcher, is also possessed of the name Jesus employed for himself, the witness, in his words, *over them as a witness*. He said, "*Thou Thyself art witness over everything."* He used "every" due to the generality of "thing", for the latter is the most non-specific of things. He used the Name the Witness, for He is the Witness of every witnessed thing in accordance with what is necessitated by the reality of that witnessed thing.[776] He thus points out that He, transcendent is He, is the Witness over the people of Jesus when he says, *I was over them as a witness while I remained among them*. This is the Real's witnessing in the matter of Jesus. Remember that it has been established that He is his tongue, his hearing, and his sight.

Then he spoke a Muhammadan Word and an Christic Word; as for its being Christic, this is because it is an utterance of Jesus, spoken of by God about him in His Book. As for its being Muhammadan, this is due to its coming from Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, in a certain place. He stood repeating it an entire night, turning to nothing else until the coming of dawn: *If Thou chastisest them, they are thy slaves; if Thou forgivest them, Thou art the Mighty, the Wise*.[777] 'Them' is a pronoun of what is absent,[778] just as 'he' is a pronoun of what is absent, as in His Words, *It is they who disbelieve*, using a pronoun of what is absent. The absentness veils them from what is intended by the witnessed and present. He said, *If Thou chastisest them*, using the pronoun of what is absent, which is the very veil in which they find themselves and which keeps them from God. God reminded them before their being present, so that when they *were* present the yeast would have determined

[775] Matter (*maddah*) refers here to the stuff of Jesus' form in the world.
[776] That is to say, any time a thing is witnessed by something else, it is at root God witnessing Himself.
[777] 5:118. That is to say, the Prophet stood the entire night repeating this verse over and over again. I do not know the tradition upon which this account is based.
[778] *Gha'ib* can simply mean the 3rd person but is also the active participle of *ghayb* or "what is absent", which I have been translating as invisible, but that translation works when *ghayb* is contrasted with *shahadah* ("witnessing", which I have been translating as "visible" to correspond to "invisible"). Here, however, it is being contrasted with *hadir* or "what is present". My best understanding of this passage is that the 3rd person (=absent) is interpreted by Ibn al-'Arabi to denote the status of not being present with God. Those who are absent from God, as denoted by the 3rd person pronoun, are veiled from Him. The "witnessed and present" refers to God, meaning that when one says the witnessed and the present one is referring to Him.

the dough, making it like itself.[779] *They are Thy slaves*, making his address in the singular, because of the doctrine of unity to which he held. There is no greater servility than that of slaves, for they cannot dispose on their own. They are determined by what their masters want, and who share them with no one. Thus he said, *Thy slaves*, making it singular. What is meant by the chastisement is their abasement, and there are none more abased than them, due to their being slaves. *If thou forgivest them*, that is, cover them from the onset of the chastisement they deserve on account of their disobedience, which is to say, make for them a cover to veil them from it and to block it from them. *Then Thou art the Mighty*, that is, the Preventor and Protector. When the Real grants this name to a slave, He is called the Giver of Might, and the one who is given the name is called 'mighty'. He is the Preventor and Protector against the chastisement and vengeance desired by the Chastiser and the Avenger. He used distinction and emphasis, again to reinforce the explanation and so that the verse would follow one mode, in His Words, *Thou Thyself knowest the things invisible*,[780] and His Words, *Thou wast Thyself the watcher over them*, and also, *Thou art Thyself the Mighty, the Wise*.[781]

This was a question and an earnest solicitation that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, put to his Lord, in that entire night of his where he repeated it until the coming of dawn, seeking a response. Had he heard an answer at the beginning of his questioning he would not have repeated it. The Real set out to him, one by one, the kinds of things for which they merited punishment. At each example set out and each thing specified he said to Him, *If Thou chastisest them, they are Thy slaves; if Thou forgivest them, Thou art Thyself the Mighty, the Wise*. If he saw, in what was set out to him, something that demanded he give the Real precedence and prefer His side, he would offer supplication against them, not for them.[782] All that was set out to him was that by which they merited what is bestowed this verse, namely surrender to God and exposure to His forgiveness.[783] It is related that the Real, when He loves the voice of His slave in his supplication to Him, delays the answer so it may be repeated—out of love, not out of reluctance. For this reason He used the Name the Wise. The Wise is He who puts things in their places, deviating not from what is demanded and sought after by their realities and qualities. The Wise is He who knows the ordering of things.[784]

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[779] That is, before they were present by compulsion on the Day of Judgment. The yeast is the inward capacity for perfection, which is meant to form the stuff of the human soul in its preparation for death.
[780] 5:109
[781] 5:118
[782] This is so because the Prophet's will is perfectly on conformity with the Will of God when he knows what that Will is. He would not pray for forgiveness if he knew that a person truly merited punishment, since he would know that such punishment is a necessary part of that person's nature.
[783] One cannot be forgiven unless one has done wrong, and one cannot surrender to God unless one is in a state of non-surrender. Thus, it is precisely because an act is punishable that it is forgivable.
[784] Part of the Divine Wisdom is to evoke prayer from people out of love. It is related in many sayings of the Prophet that God loves the sound of his entreating servant. This last sentence obviously

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was wont to repeat this verse, being possessed of a great knowledge from God most high. Let him who recites recite it this way, otherwise silence is better. When God graces a slave to speak of some matter, He does so only after having willed its response as well as the fulfillment of his need, so let no one believe that that for which they have been graced is slow in its coming. Rather, let them persevere as the Prophet persevered over this verse, in all his states, that they may hear with their ears or hearing—however you like, or however it is that God lets you hear the response.[785] If He allows you to ask with your tongue, He will have you hear with your ears, and if He allows you to do so as meaning, then He will have you hear with your hearing.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of the All-Merciful in the Word of Solomon

It is, that is, the letter, *from Solomon*, *and it is*, that is, the contents of the letter, *in the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate*.[786] Some have thought that the name of Solomon came before the Name of God, but this is not the case. They speak inappropriately, in a way not befitting the knowledge that Solomon, peace be upon him, had of his Lord. How could what they think be fitting, seeing that Bilqis said of him, *A letter honorable has been cast unto me*,[787] which is to say it was honorable in her sight. Perhaps what led them to this opinion was the event of Chosroe's tearing up the letter of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. Now, he did not tear it up until he had read all of it and knew its contents. Bilqis would have done the same thing were it not for the grace she was given. Respect for the author, whether his name, upon him be peace, came before the Name of God, glorified and majestic be He, or after would not have saved the letter from being destroyed.[788]

Solomon employed the two mercies, the mercy of free-giving and the mercy

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addresses the question of reward and punishment, but following as it does the statement of God's love for prayer it also touches on the mystery of human prayer and its role in the order of things. Recall that in the Ringstone of Seth Ibn al-'Arabi asserts that it is precisely through supplication that certain possibilities are actualized in existence. In addition to the alchemical effect that prayer has on the soul that opens itself to God, perhaps the love here also refers to the divine love for manifestation, namely, that peculiar kind of manifestation which is only possible through the act of supplication.

[785] "Ears" signifies physical hearing, while "hearing", since it is used in contrast, is meant to signify the audition of the heart. The heart's hearing is the principle of the body's hearing. Responses to prayers can thus come inwardly or outwardly, or perhaps formally and formlessly.

[786] 27:30

[787] 27:29

[788] This is the Quranic story of Solomon's invitation to Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. Some exegetes have put forward the idea that Solomon had his name appear before *In the Name of God*. Ibn al-'Arabi suggests that they were thinking of the Prophet Muhammad's invitation to the Persian ruler Chosroe to enter Islam, a letter which Chosroe read and tore to pieces. That letter began with *In the Name of God*, but was destroyed only after it was read through. Ibn al-'Arabi thus rejects the suggestion that respect for King Solomon would have protected the letter.

of obligation, and which are the All-Merciful and the Compassionate. He freely gives through the All-Merciful, and obligates through the Compassionate. This obligation comes from the free-giving, and thus the Compassionate is contained within the All-Merciful. Indeed, He enjoined mercy on Himself, glorified be He, that it be meted out to the slave in accord with the acts that the slave offers mentioned by the Real. This is a right one has against God, which He has made as an obligation upon Himself, and by means of which one claims this mercy, namely the mercy of obligation.[789] Whosoever is a slave of this kind knows who the agent is therein.[790] Acts are distributed among the eight bodily parts of man, and the Real has informed us that He is the selfhood of each of these bodily parts, and so the agent is none other than the Real, while the form is that of the slave. His selfhood is enfolded within him, that is, within His Name[791] and no other, for indeed the Real is the very thing that is manifest. He[792] is called 'creation', by which—and also by his having not been and then having been—the Names the Manifest and the Last belong to the slave. Because of his manifestation's reliance upon Him, and the act's origination from Him, there are the Names the Hidden and the First. When you see creation, you see the First, the Last, the Manifest, and the Hidden.[793]

Solomon was not absent from this knowledge. Indeed, it was part of the kingdom that was meet for no one after him—speaking here of its manifestation in the world of witnessing. Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, was given what Solomon was given, though he did not manifest it. God most high

[789] Freely given mercy (*rahmat al-imtinan*) and obligatory mercy (*rahmat al-wujub*) correspond to the two Divine Names *al-Rahman* (the All-Merciful) and *al-Rahim* (the Compassionate), which appear in Solomon's letter: *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate*. As is mentioned in other places, *al-Rahman* is a Name of the Essence, while *al-Rahim* is a Name of a Quality or Act. The Mercy of God's Essence or Self is totally unconditioned by anything from the outside. It bestows mercy on all identities without exclusion, and remains Beyond Need (*al-Ghani*) in doing so. The mercy of *al-Rahman* is beyond the opposition between good and evil. *Al-Rahim* is that mercy which actually shows mercy and love *to* things. It is the power of mercy and good *over* evil in the world. As Ibn al-'Arabi says elsewhere, it is the mercy denoted by *al-Rahman* that actually grants manifestation to the power of *al-Rahim* in the world. (It is the Essence Mercy that grants the Names a place to be what they are.) The "obligation" enters in when there is a relationship between God and slave. Being the Compassionate, God is obligated to grant mercy and love in response to the good deeds of His creatures.

[790] That is, someone who truly merits God's mercy will come to know that in truth God is the doer of all deeds.

[791] Each person has an immutable identity, but each immutable identity itself has a unique Name of God which is its lord. In reality, each individual in the world is the manifestation of a unique Name of God. It is in this sense that the Real is "the very thing that is manifest".

[792] That is, the slave.

[793] The slave is the 'last' in the sense of coming after having not been, and is manifest or outward in his most obvious nature. However, there can be no last without there being a first, and their can be no outward without an inward (or manifestation without hidden non-manifestation). By virtue of the creaturely dependence upon God, we know there is an inward when we see the outward, and that there is a first when we see the last.

enabled him to subjugate a jinn that had come by night to attack him.[794] He desired to seize it and tie it to one of the columns of the mosque until morning so that the children of Madinah could play with it. He made mention of the supplication of Solomon, and God cast it away in disgrace. He, peace be upon him, did not manifest that which Solomon was given power over and manifested. He said, *a kingdom* without being general, and thus we know that he meant *some* kingdom. We have seen that others had a share in every part of the kingdom he was given by God, and that he was only privileged in being given their totality, and that he was privileged—as we have seen in the tradition about the jinn—only in manifesting it. He was privileged in having the totality and the manifestation. Had the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, not said in the tradition of the jinn, "God gave me power over it," we would have said that when he rose to seize it God reminded him of the supplication of Solomon so that he would know that God would not grant him power to seize it, for God cast it away in disgrace. Since he said, "God gave me power over it," we know that God most high granted him disposal over it. God then reminded him of the supplication of Solomon, of which he took heed, thus having *adab* with Him. From this we know that it was its general manifestation that was meet for no creature after Solomon.

Our aim in this matter is but to speak of and call attention to the two mercies Solomon mentioned in the two Names, whose exegesis[795] in the language of the Arabs is, *the All-Merciful, the Compassionate*. He qualified the mercy of obligation and made absolute the mercy of free-giving, spoken of in His Words, *And My Mercy encompasseth everything*,[796] even the Divine Names, by which I mean the realities of the relationships. He gives to them through us. We are the end result of the mercy of free-giving upon the Divine Names and dominical relationships. He then made it an obligation upon Himself through our manifestation to ourselves, teaching us that He is our selfhood, in order for us to know that He made it an obligation upon Himself only for Himself. Thus the mercy never leaves Him. To whom shall He give freely, as there is naught but He?[797]

Yet, there must needs be a language of ranking, since among creation there appears a ranking in excellence in terms of knowledge, such that one says, "This person is more knowing than that one," though the identity is one. What is meant by

[794] "A jinn (*'ifrit*) came upon me…to cut off the Prayer, and God gave me power over it. I desired to tie him to one of the columns of the mosque so that you could all see him in the morning. I remembered the words of my brother Solomon, *'My Lord forgive me, and give me a kingdom such as may not befall anyone after me.'* (38:35) So God cast it away in disgrace." (Bukhari 8:75)

[795] This is not a typical way to use the word *tafsir* ("exegesis"), and Qaysari suggests that it signifies that the names we articulate are really names of the Names.

[796] 7:156

[797] In this paragraph Ibn al-'Arabi is once again asserting that through us the Divine Names are shown mercy, because they could otherwise not be manifested anywhere. When God obligates Himself to show mercy to us, He is really obligating mercy for Himself, because our true selves are none other than the Self. Ultimately, God shows mercy to only Himself.

this is the same as what is meant in saying that the connection of Will is lacking in relation to the connection of Knowledge. This represents a ranking in excellence within the Divine Qualities. The same is true for the perfection of the connection of Will with its superiority and abundance in relation to the connection of Power, and the same for Sight and Hearing. All of the Divine Names are comprised in degrees, some ranked in excellence above others. Such is the case with the ranking in excellence of what is manifest in creation, where one says, "This person is more knowing than that one," though the identity is one.[798] Just as when you proffer some Divine Name you name it with all the Divine Names and describe it by them, so too do manifested creatures have a meetness for everything with which they are ranked. Each part of the world is the entire world, that is to say, each is receptive to the realities of the distinct parts of the entire world.[799] This does not detract from our saying that the Selfhood of the Real is identical with Zayd and ʻAmr—although Zayd differs from ʻAmr in terms of knowledge—and that it[800] should be found in ʻAmr while being more perfect in Zayd, just as the Divine Names are ranked in excellence and are none other than the Real. With respect to being the Knower He is more universal in connection than He is with respect to being He-who-wills or the Powerful—and these are He and no other.

Friend, do not come to know Him in one place and be ignorant of Him in another, nor affirm Him in one place while denying Him in another. Only do so if you affirm Him in the way He affirmed Himself, and negate Him in relation to a thing in the way He negated Himself, as in the verse which brings together negation and affirmation in His regard, where He says, *There is none like unto Him*, thus negating, and, *And He is the Hearing, the Seeing*,[801] thus affirming through a quality which applies universally for every hearing and seeing animal. There is naught but animals,

[798] As was discussed in the introduction, the Unity of the Self does not exclude but rather entails a hierarchy of Qualities, some co-related, others dependent upon others. God must know in order to will, and must will in order to exercise power. By "connection" what is meant is their connection with their respective objects, i.e., the object of knowledge, the object of will, the object of power, etc… This hierarchy within Qualities is a kind of door to understanding multiplicity in Unity. Each of these Qualities is a Name of God, distinct yet belonging to a single Named. Each person is also a Name of God, and so the differences between them do not detract from Unity if they are understood the way Ibn al-ʻArabi mentions here.

[799] There is a saying in Sufism that says that wherever *wujud* goes it comes with all its host (*junud*). Anything that is real is real because and only because God is real in it, which is another way of saying that God is present everywhere and in everything. If the Divine Self is present in everything, then so are all the Divine Names and Qualities, since the Self and the Names are not separate things. Although different Names manifest in different places and the hierarchy of which Ibn al-ʻArabi speaks is a reality, God cannot be in a place without His Names and Qualities being there as well. The difference lies in *how* they are there, which is why one speaks of hiddenness and manifestation, or inwardness and outwardess. The meetness (*ahliyyah*) does not mean an actualized manifestation, which is why Ibn al-ʻArabi speaks of each part of the world as being "receptive" (*qabil*) to the realities, i.e. the meanings (*maʻani*), of the other parts.

[800] That is, knowledge.

[801] 42:11

except that this is hidden in this lower world from the perception of some men, but it will become manifest in the Hereafter to all men, for it is the abode of animals. This is also the case in this lower world, except that their life is veiled from some of God's slaves, so that the special dignities and the ranking in excellence among God's slaves might become manifest by virtue of what they perceive of the world's realities.[802] The Real's determination is more manifest in one whose perception is universal than in one who lacks this universality.[803] Be not veiled from the ranking in excellence, saying that the words of one who says that, "Creation is the Selfhood of the Real," are wrong, seeing that I have already shown you the ranking in excellence among the Divine Names. Do not doubt that they[804] are the Real, and that what they indicate—that which is named by them—is none other than God most high.

How should Solomon put his name before the Name of God, as some suppose, when he is part of the totality existentiated by mercy? It must needs be that the All-Merciful and Compassionate come first, in order to allow the dependence of the object of mercy. It would have contradicted reality, putting first what should rightly come afterwards and putting afterwards what should rightly come first in the situation where it would so merit. It was part of the Bilqis' wisdom and the exaltedness of her knowledge that she did not say who cast the letter unto her. She only did this in order to teach her companions that she had attained to things by a path they knew not. This is part of the divine rule of monarchs, for when the path by which information reaches the monarch is unknown, the people of the state will fear for themselves because of their activities, and will not engage in any activity unless it be in some affair of theirs which is known by their ruler, thus feeling secure from the danger of that activity. If it were specified for them by whom information reaches the monarch, they would cajole him and tempt him with bribes so that they could do as they wished without it reaching their monarch. She said, *Has been cast unto me*,[805] without giving the name of he who had cast it, as an exercise of power, causing the people of her kingdom as well as the elite among her advisors to take caution. That is why she merited precedence over them.

As for the excellence of the human knower[806] over the knower from amongst the jinn, in terms of the secrets of disposal and the special characteristics of things,

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[802] Seeing and hearing are qualities we closely associate with life, and they usually belong only to animals. In reality, however, all things are infused with the Divine Life, and so all things are 'animals' and have a certain share in consciousness, represented by the faculties of sight and hearing. Some people are able to realize this vision in this life, but all will come to realize it in the Hereafter.

[803] To say, "The Real's determination is more manifest," is the same as saying that the Qualities of God appear more strongly in such a one. *Idrak*, which is rendered as "perception", could also be well translated as "consciousness", "grasp", or "understanding". By universality what is meant is the scope of one's perception, or the breadth and depth of one's understanding.

[804] That is, the Names.

[805] 27:29

[806] Referring to Asif ibn Barkhiyaa, see notes below.

this is known by the measure of time.[807] The return of the glance of one looking upon a thing is faster than one's rising from his seat, for the motion of the eye in perceiving what it perceives is faster than the motion of a body from where it moves. The moment in which an eye moves is the very moment in which it attaches to its object of sight, regardless of the distance between the onlooker and the object. The moment of the eyes' opening is the moment of their connection with the fixed sphere of the stars. The moment of his glance returning to him is the very moment of his perception's absence. A man's rising from his place is not like this, that is, it does not have this speed. Thus Asif ibn Barkhiya[808] was more complete than the jinn in his action; the very words of Asif ibn Barkhiya were the action, in a single moment. At that moment, Solomon, upon him be peace, saw with his eye the throne of Bilqis *settled before him*,[809] so that it not be imagined that he perceived it while it was still in its place, having not been conveyed. In our view, there is no instantaneous conveyance.[810] Rather, it was brought to non-existence and then existentiated, from whence none know but those availed of it, spoken of in His Words, *No, indeed, but they are uncertain of a new creation*.[811] No moment persists wherein they would not see what they see. Now, since it is as we have spoken of here, the moment of its non-existence—that is, the non-existence of the throne—from its place was its very existence before Solomon, owing to the renewal of creation through the Breaths. No one has knowledge of this measure.[812] Indeed, man is not aware of himself not being and then being at each breath. Do not say 'then' as necessitating a delay in time, for that is not correct. Among the Arabs, in certain instances, 'then' evokes a precedence in terms of causal degree, as in the words of the poet:

Like unto the shaking of the spear, then it trembled

Now, without doubt the moment of the shaking is the very moment of the trembling of the shaken thing. Thus "then" was used without there being a delay in time. Such is the case with the renewal of creation through the Breaths: the moment of non-existence is the moment of the existence of its likeness, as is the case for the renewal of accidents as found in the demonstrations of the Ash'arites. This question of acquiring the throne of Bilqis is one of the most difficult of questions, except for one

[807] This passage is speaking about the verses where Solomon addresses his Council, *He said, 'O Council, which of you will bring me her throne, before they come to me in surrender?' An efreet of the jinns said, 'I will bring it to thee, before thou risest from thy place; I have strength for it and I am trusty.' Said he who possessed knowledge of the Book, 'I will bring it to thee, before ever thy glance returns to thee.'* (27:38-40)
[808] According to Qaysari, the vizier of Solomon and the Pole of his age.
[809] 27:40
[810] That is to say, without some extent of time there can be no conveyance, because being conveyed from one place to another is a motion and motion requires a certain duration of time.
[811] 50:15
[812] That is, the 'measure' of time between the ever-renewing breaths.

who knows what we have mentioned above concerning its story. Asif's superiority in this consisted solely in the actualization of this renewal in the gathering of Solomon, upon him be peace. For one who understands what we have mentioned here, the throne traversed no span, neither did the earth contract for it, nor was it[813] pierced.[814]

This took place through the offices of one of Solomon's companions, in order that greater things be left for Solomon in the souls of those present, namely Bilqis and her companions. This was so[815] because Solomon was a gift of God most high to David, spoken of in His Words, transcendent is He, *And We gave unto David Solomon*.[816] A gift is a bestowal by the giver by way of benefaction, not through agreement or merit. He was a perfect blessing, a mighty proof,[817] and a triumphant force. As for his knowledge, there are His Words, *And We made Solomon to understand it*,[818] though there was opposition in the judgment.[819] Both were given judgment and knowledge by God. The knowledge of David was given to him by God, while the knowledge of Solomon was God's knowledge in the matter, since He was the Judge without intermediary. Solomon interpreted truly, from a seat of veracity.[820] Recall the independent jurist who is correct as to the judgment of God—and by whose means God judges—in some matter: if he carries it out on his own, or in accord with what was revealed for him to the Prophet, he has two rewards. The one who is mistaken concerning this particular judgment has one reward, although that is still knowledge and judgment.[821] This Muhammadan community was given

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[813] That is, the earth.

[814] Ibn al-'Arabi is arguing that the jinn's offer was to go and bring the throne back to Solomon by bringing it across the distance that separated Solomon from her throne. Asif ibn Barkhiyaa did not 'move' the throne at all, but made it to exist before Solomon at the very moment he made it cease to exist before Bilqis. How he did so is not explained here, but it is significant that he is spoken of as *he who possessed knowledge of the Book*, and as was mentioned above he was considered to be a spiritual Pole.

[815] That is, greater things being left for Solomon.

[816] 38:80

[817] This is elsewhere translated as "conclusive argument" (*al-hujjat al-balighah*).

[818] 21:79

[819] *And David and Solomon—when they gave judgment concerning the tillage, when the sheep of the people strayed there, and we bore witness to their judgment; and We made Solomon to understand it, and unto each We gave judgment and knowledge*. (21:78-79) In this instance David and Solomon delivered different judgments.

[820] Recall that the verse says, *We made Solomon to understand it*, singling him out without mentioning David. Ibn al-'Arabi interprets this to mean that, at least in this instance, God was judging in the form of Solomon, while David was judging based on the knowledge he given by God. In Solomon's case God acted without intermediary, whereas David acted as a man based on his own knowledge, which of course was given to him by God. Thus his judgment was not unmediated.

[821] It is still knowledge and judgment in the sense that the rulings of a *mujtahid* are based on the transmitted texts and have their own special place in the economy of the Divine Law. Even though they do not carry the same weight as unambiguous rulings in the Quran and Sunnah, the results of the independent reasoning of a *mujtahid* are legally binding. Independent juridical reasoning by a qualified person is always considered 'correct', although it may be that the judgment of the person is not objectively the right one. According to a tradition, the Prophet says that the 'incorrect' person has

the rank of Solomon and the rank of David, upon them be peace, in judgement.[822] There is no community superior to it.[823]

When Bilqis saw her throne, knowing the distance of that span and the impossibility of its being conveyed, in her view, in that length of time, she said, *'It seems the same,'* and spoke truthfully, by virtue of what we have mentioned concerning the renewal of creation through likenesses, for it *was* it, and the affair was true, just as you are, in the moment of renewal, the very same as what you were the previous moment. Now, Solomon's instruction in the pavilion stemmed from the perfection of his knowledge. It was said to her, *Enter the pavilion*.[824] It was a pavilion paved smoothly with glass, with no flaws. When she saw it she supposed it was a *spreading water*, and she bared her legs so that the water would not touch her garments. Through this he called her attention to the fact that her throne, which she had seen, was of this kind. This was the utmost in fair-mindedness, for through this he let her know that she was correct in saying, *'It seems the same*'.[825] When this happened she said, '*My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, and I surrender with Solomon*, referring here to Solomon's surrender, *to God, the Lord of the Worlds'*. She did not submit to Solomon, but submitted only to God, Lord of the Worlds. She did not qualify her submission, just as the messengers do not qualify their belief in God, as opposed to Pharaoh, for he said, *the Lord of Moses and Aaron*,[826] although he was attached in some manner with this Bilqisian submission. He did not, however, have the strength, and so she was more possessed of understanding than was Pharaoh as regards one's submission to God. Pharaoh was determined by the moment when he said, *I believe in He in whom the Children of Israel believe*,[827] thus being specific, and he was only specific because he had seen the magicians say, in their act of faith, *the Lord of Moses and Aaron*. The surrender of Bilqis was the same as the surrender of Solomon, since she said, *with Solomon*, and followed him. He would hold to no belief except that she would believe the same.

Likewise, we are on the Straight Path, upon which the Lord is, due to our

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his reward, but the 'correct' person has a double reward for his laudable intellectual activity and for being right.

[822] That is to say, Muslims have the possibility for both the correct ruling and the laudable but incorrect ruling, exemplified here respectively by Solomon and David.

[823] *You are the best community ever brought forth to men…* (3:110)

[824] 27:44

[825] Solomon first asked, *'Is thy throne like this?'* She replied, *'It seems the same.'* Then he asked her to enter the pavilion. The throne was a likeness to her throne, and the floor of the pavilion was a likeness of water. The first is the likeness of a being in comparison to what it was before, that is, before each breath of manifestation. The latter is a likeness of appearances, where one mistakes something for another, like Sankara's rope and snake. The throne was a likeness from the point of view of the renewing breaths, since each moment brings a *new creation*. Thus she correctly identified that it was not the very same throne as the one in Sheba, but seemed the same, i.e. was a likeness just as the glass was a likeness of water.

[826] 7:122

[827] 11:90

forelocks being in His Hand. It is impossible that we should be separated from Him. We are with Him implicitly, while He is with us explicitly, for He said, *He is with you wherever you are*,[828] and we are with Him because He has our forelock in His grasp. He is with Himself, transcendent is He, wherever He may make us walk on His Path. None are there in the world who are not on a straight path, and which is the Lord's Path, transcendent is He.[829] Bilqis learned this from Solomon and so said, *the Lord of the Worlds*, not specifying any one from among the worlds.

As for the subjugation by which Solomon was specially favored and by means of which he was superior to others, and which God made part of his kingdom, being meet for none who would come after him, it consisted in this being dependent upon his command.[830] He said, *So We subjected to him the wind, that ran at his commandment*.[831] It did not consist in its being subjugation, for God says of us all, without specification, *And He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all together, from Him*.[832] He mentioned the subjugation of the wind, the stars, and so forth, but as being dependent upon the Command of God, not upon our command. Solomon was only favored—if you understand—with this command, neither through union nor through willpower, but rather through the command alone. We say this because we know that the bodies of the world are passive in relation to the willpower of souls when these latter reside in the station of union. This has been shown to us on this path. What came from Solomon was the bare articulation of the command to whatever it was whose subjugation he desired, without willpower and without union.[833]

Know, may God strengthen us and thee with a spirit from Him, that when the likes of this gift are attained by some slave, it does not diminish the kingdom of his afterlife, nor is it reckoned against him. Yet Solomon, upon him be peace, did request it from his Lord most high; the taste of the Path[834] demands that we say that what is stored away for others was hastened on for him, and for which He would hold them answerable in the Hereafter were they to desire it. God said to him, *This is Our gift*, not saying to thee and to no other, *to bestow*, that is, to give, *or withhold without*

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[828] 57:4

[829] This is fairly clear given what Ibn al-'Arabi already said in the Ringstone of Hud concerning the straight path to the Lord. God is explicitly with us as attested to by the verse, *He is with you wherever you are*, and we are with implicitly by virtue of our identities being with Him in His Knowledge.

[830] That is, the special favor consists in this subjugation originating from Solomon's command (*amr*).

[831] 38:6

[832] 45:13

[833] That is to say, Solomon did not command the wind by virtue of his *himmah* or power of will. He was granted the special privilege of being able to command the wind simply by speaking, without any special concentration. This is different then the miraculous effects saints can have on the world, as discussed in the Ringstone of Lot, for they require a special kind of effort for that disposal in the world to take place.

[834] This could mean that he has attained direct knowledge of this while on the Path (that is, the Path of Tasawwuf) or it could mean that the experience he has garnered on the Path leads him to that conclusion.

reckoning.[835] We know, from the taste of the Path, that his request resulted from his Lord's Command. When a request occurs as a result of the Divine Command, the one who requests will have the complete reward for his request. If the Maker most high so wills, He fulfills the need associated with what is requested of Him, and if He so wills He withholds it. Now, this slave carried out what God made incumbent upon him, in obeying His Command regarding what he had asked of his Lord. Had he asked for it on his own, without his Lord commanding him to it, He would have held him answerable for it because of it.[836]

This holds for everything concerning which God is asked. Recall that He said to His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, *Say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge*.[837] He obeyed the Command of his Lord, and would seek increase in knowledge, even interpreting milk as being knowledge when it was poured out for him. Recall how he interpreted the vision of his slumber, when he was given a goblet of milk, drank from it, and gave the excess to Umar ibn al-Khattab. They said to him, "How dost thou interpret it?" "Knowledge," he said.[838] Such was also the case when he was carried by night.[839] The angel gave him a vessel containing milk and a vessel containing wine. He drank the milk and the angel said to him, "Thou hast attained to the *fitrah*.[840] May God grant attainment to thy Community through thee."[841] When the milk appeared it was the form of knowledge. It was knowledge represented in the form of milk, as when Gabriel appeared to Mary in the form of a man without fault. When the Prophet said, "Mankind sleeps, and when they die, they awaken," he called attention to the fact that anything one sees in the life of this lower world is like a sleeper's vision. It is imagination, and necessarily requires interpretation.

Being is but imagination
Yet truly is the Real

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[835] 38:39

[836] This recalls the discussion in the Ringstone of Seth, where Ibn al-'Arabi speaks of those who ask things of God because God commands them to do so, as in the verse, *Call upon Me, I shall answer you* (40:60). When someone asks a thing as an act of obedience to God's command, he will not be answerable for it, which is to say that he will not be questioned about this act on the Day of Judgment, whereas if he asks of God from himself he may be taken to task for his asking. Once again Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to show that there is supplication and supplication, which is to say there is a way to ask God virtuously and a way to ask selfishly. The best supplication belongs to him to knows that God wants to hear our prayers, and indeed is the source of the grace that allows us to turn our faces towards heaven in the first place.

[837] 20:114

[838] Ibn Hanbal, 2:83

[839] Referring to the Prophet's Night Journey (*al-isra*), when he was taken from Makkah to Jerusalem and from there ascended to Heaven.

[840] A very difficult word to translate, sometimes rendered as "primordial norm" but which perhaps can be translated as "original nature". From the Islamic point of view human beings are born pure and unspoiled, and only later come to acquire faults and commit sins. That unblemished state is how we began, and it is the true nature towards which the Sufis seek.

[841] Bukhari 40:24

Whoso understandeth this
Hath mastered the mysteries of the Path

When milk was presented to him, may God bless him and grant him peace, he would say, "O God, bless us by this and grant us increase of it," because he would see it as the form of knowledge, and he had been commanded to seek increase in knowledge. When something other than milk was presented to him, he would say, "O God, bless us by this and feed us with what is better."

When one is granted something by God as a result of a request that was prompted by a Divine Command, God does not reckon that against him in the abode of the Hereafter. When one is granted something by God as a result of a request not prompted by a Divine Command, the matter returns unto God: if He so wills He will hold him answerable for it, and if He so wills He will not. It is my hope that God, especially as it concerns knowledge, shall not hold us answerable for it, for indeed His Command to His Prophet, upon him be peace, to seek increase in knowledge is equivalent to His commanding his community. Indeed God says, *In the Messenger of God you have a goodly example*.[842] For one whose intelligence is based on God most high, what example could be greater than this?[843] If we have instructed you in this Solomonic station in a complete way, you will have seen something the knowledge of which would terrify you. Indeed, most of the men of knowledge on this path are ignorant of Solomon's state and of his rank. The affair is not as they have supposed it to be.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Existence in the Word of David

Know that, since prophethood and messengerhood are special divine favors, there is no earning associated with them, and here I am referring to law-giving prophethood. He bestowed upon them—transcendent is He and upon them be peace—in this way. It was a thing freely given, not a recompense. Nor does He seek recompense from them on account of it. His bestowal upon them is by way of blessing and benefaction. He, most high, said, *And we gave to him Isaac and Jacob*,[844] that is, He gave them to Abraham the Friend, upon him be peace. Of Job He said, *And we gave to him his family and the like of them with them*.[845] Of Moses He said, *And We gave him his brother Aaron, of Our mercy, a Prophet*,[846] and so forth. What attended to them in the beginning attended to them in all or most of their states, and was none other than the Name the Giver.

[842] 33:21
[843] That is, greater than the Prophet.
[844] 6:84
[845] 38:43
[846] 19:53

Regarding David He said, *And We gave David bounty from Us*.[847] He did not associate it with any request for recompense, nor did he tell him that He bestowed this thing he mentioned as a recompense. When he did ask thankfulness for doing so He asked it of the people of David, though He was not opposed to mentioning David, so that they would thank Him for it for what He bestowed upon David. For David it was a gift of blessing and benefaction, but for his people it was not, due to the request for recompense, for He said, *Labor, O People of David, in thankfulness; for few indeed are those that are thankful among My slaves*.[848] If the prophets, peace be upon them, have thanked God for that by which He has bestowed favor upon them and given unto them, they do not do so prompted by a request from God. Rather, this comes from their own souls voluntarily. Recall how God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, stood until his feet became swollen, in gratitude, since God had pardoned his errors which passed before and those which would come after. When he was asked about this, he said, "Shall I not be a grateful slave?"[849] He said of Noah, *Indeed he was a grateful slave*, and, *few are the slaves of God who are grateful*.[850]

The first favor by which God blessed David, upon him be peace, was in giving him a name containing no connecting letters, cutting him off from the world by it, telling us about him by means of his name alone, which consists of the *dal*, the *alif*, and the *waw*. Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, was given a name containing connecting and disjoining letters, and by means of which He separated him and joined him to the world, bringing together the two states in his name. He likewise brought them together for David in meaning, though He did not place this in his name. This was a special privilege of Muhammad over David, peace be upon them both—that is, to be alerted to it through his name. He completed the affair for him in all of his aspects. Such was also the case for his name Ahmad.[851] This is part of the wisdom of God most high.

Speaking of what He had given David by way of bounty, He mentioned the mountains echoing his glorification. They would glorify as he glorified, so that their act would be his. The same was true for the birds. He granted him power and described him as possessing it, and He gave him wisdom and judgment of affairs. The greatest benevolence and closest rank by which God favored him consists in His making explicit reference to his vicegerency. He did not do so for any other children

[847] 34:10
[848] 34:13
[849] Bukhari *K. al-tahajjud* 6
[850] 17:3
[851] *Muhammad* consists of the letters *mim*, *ha'*, and *dal*, the latter which is a non-connecting letter. Ahmad is made up of *alif*, *ha'*, *mim*, and *dal*, the first and last of which are non-connecting. The dal, alif, and waw which make up the Name Dawud are all non-connecting, meaning that when written they are always followed by a break in the script. Although this union of connection and disjunction was manifested in the name Muhammad, David still possessed this reality of being separate and joined to the world (which is how Ibn al-'Arabi describes the Prophet) in meaning (*ma'na*), that is to say, inwardly.

of his kind, though there were vicegerents among them. He said, *O David, behold, We have appointed thee a vicegerent in the earth; therefore judge between men justly, and follow not caprice*,[852] that is, do not follow anything that occurs to you in your decision which is not revelation from Me, *lest it lead thee astray from the way of God,* that is, from the path by means of which I reveal unto My messengers. Then He showed *adab* with him, transcendent is He, and said, *Surely those who stray from the way of God—there awaits them a terrible chastisement for that they have forgotten the Day of Reckoning*. He did not say to him, "If thou strayest from the way of God there awaiteth thee a terrible chastisement." If one were to say that Adam also had vicegerency explicitly mentioned in his regard, we would say that it was not mentioned as it was in the case of David. He only said to the angels, *Indeed I am appointing a vicegerent in the earth*.[853] He did not say, "I am appointing Adam as a vicegerent in the earth." Even if He had said that, it would not be the same as His saying, *We have appointed thee a vicegerent in the earth*, for the one is unambiguous, while the other is not so. The way in which Adam is mentioned in the story thereafter does not indicate that he is the very vicegerent explicitly referred to by God. So take care in contemplating how the Real informs us of His slaves when He so informs. Such was also the case regarding Abraham the Friend, *Indeed I shall make thee a leader* (*imam*) *for the people*.[854] He did not say vicegerent, even though we know that in this case the leadership (*imamah*) is vicegerency. Still, one is not the equivalent of the other, for He did not mention it with the most specific of its names, namely vicegerency. Part of David's being specially favored through vicegerency consists in his being a vicegerent in the domain of judgment, and which can only be a vicegerency for God. He said to him, *Therefore judge between men justly*. The vicegerency of Adam may not have been of this level, such that his vicegerency would have consisted in his being a successor to whomever was there before, and not in his being God's deputy over His creation in the domain of the Divine's judgment of them. Even if it *had* occurred that way, our words here still only concern this explicit reference and the explanation of it.[855]

God has vicegerents on earth who are vicegerents of God; they are the messengers. In our day vicegerency is the messengers' vicegerency, not God's, because those of our day judge only in accordance with what was prescribed for them by the Messenger, and deviate not therefrom.[856] However, there is a fine point here

[852] 38:26
[853] 2:30
[854] 2:124
[855] That is, explanation of David's being explicitly mentioned as a vicegerent, as opposed to the case of Adam whose vicegerency is not as explicitly stated. Moreover David is mentioned as being the vicegerent in the domain of judging men's affairs, and this was also not explicitly stated in the case of Adam.
[856] That is to say, while the messengers are God's deputies, we are in turn the deputies of the messengers.

that only the likes of us know, and it concerns the reception of and judgment by that which was legislated to the Messenger, upon him be peace. The Messenger's vicegerent is he who makes a judgment by means of what was transmitted from the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, or by means of juridical reasoning, the principles of which are also transmitted from the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace.[857] Among us are those who receive from God, and so are vicegerents for God in that very judgment. The content[858] comes to them from whence came the content to the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. Outwardly it[859] follows, since there is no contradiction in the ruling, as when Jesus will descend and judge,[860] and as said to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, in His Words, *Those are they whom God has guided; so follow their guidance*.[861] As concerns what they know, namely the form of this reception, they are competent[862] and in conformity. In this regard they are like the laws the Prophet affirmed which belonged to the messengers who came before him. And since he affirmed them, we follow these laws—insofar as he affirmed them, not with respect to their being laws of others before him.[863] Likewise, what the vicegerent receives from God the very same as what the Messenger received from Him. In the language of unveiling we say the vicegerent of God, and in the language of the outward we say the vicegerent of God's Messenger. This is why the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, died without explicitly bestowing vicegerency on anyone. He did not specify this because he knew that in his community there would be those who receive from their Lord, and who would therefore be vicegerents of God, though being in conformity with the prescribed legal rulings. Since he knew this, may God bless him and grant him peace, he did not restrict the matter.

God has vicegerents in His creation who receive from the lode of the Messenger and messengers, receiving what the messengers receive. They know the

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[857] Speaking of those who either enact the commands of the Prophet or, through juridical reasoning, arrive at the law for a given new situation.
[858] That is, the content of the judgment.
[859] That is, what is received will be in keeping with and will follow the outward Law.
[860] In various traditions it is related that when Jesus returns at the end of time he will rule according to the Law of Muhammad.
[861] 6:90, which is a reference to the other messengers and prophets.
[862] Instead of "competent" one could also say specially favored (*mukhtass*).
[863] The Prophet was commanded to *follow their guidance*, which is not the same as following the particular rulings of their laws. That is to say, the Prophet received from the same source as those other prophets, and what Ibn al-'Arabi is saying here is that those who are vicegerents of the Prophet also have a share in drawing knowledge from this source. Although they receive directly from God, what they receive is completely in keeping with what the Prophet received directly from God, and in its outward form it conforms to the overall Law that was established by Muhammad and which will maintain its position until the end of the world. Muslims follow the other prophets spiritually, not legally. In a sense, that is the theme of the entire *Ringstones*: Ibn al-'Arabi lives and breathes in the world created by the Muhammadan revelation, and it is precisely by conforming to this world that he is able to draw sustenance from the spiritual light of the other prophets. For a Sufi, the other prophets, and indeed all the saints as well, are stars and planets in the Muhammadan firmament.

superiority of the one who excels them in this regard, for the messenger can receive increase. The vicegerent does not receive increase, which he would if he were a messenger. He is given knowledge and judgment only in what is prescribed specifically to the Messenger. Outwardly he follows him and does not differ, which is not so for the messengers. Do you not see that when the Jews imagined that Jesus, upon him be peace, was not going to add to Moses—this being similar to what we have said regarding the vicegerency of our day in relation to the Messenger—they believed in him and affirmed him, and that when he added a ruling or abrogated one established by Moses—since Jesus was a messenger—they could not bear it because it went against their belief? The Jews were ignorant of the matter *as it was*, and therefore sought his death. This is part of his story as told to us by God in his sublime Book, about him and about them. Since he was a messenger he could receive increase, either by removing an established ruling, or by adding one, although this removal is without doubt an added ruling itself. The vicegerency of our day does not possess this degree. It can only remove from or add to the Law established through juridical reasoning, and not to the Law articulated by Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace.[864]

It may be that something manifests from a vicegerent that contradicts some tradition with respect to some ruling. It is then imagined that this results from juridical reasoning, but this is not so. It is only that this tradition about the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was not established for this *imam* through unveiling.[865] Had it been so established he would have judged by it. Even if its path of transmission came from a trustworthy man on the authority of other trustworthy men, they are still not immune from conjecture and from transmitting something according to its meaning.[866] The likes of this come from the vicegerent of our day, and likewise it will come from Jesus, upon him be peace. When he descends he will remove much of the established Law arrived at through juridical reasoning, and by his removal shall make clear the prescribed form of the Real which he followed, mainly because the judgments of the great scholars conflict with one another as they concern

[864] Here Ibn al-'Arabi clarifies his earlier point. Even though a vicegerent of the Prophet may receive from God, he can in no way overturn the structure or essence of the Law. Thus, one can give a judgment as to when one can shorten the canonical Prayers in circumstances not explicitly addressed in the transmitted Law, but one can never claim to do away with the overall obligation for canonical Prayer. Juridical reasoning operates within a latitude already provided by the explicitly transmitted texts. The "increase" spoken of here is precisely the authority to change in a fundamental way the Divine Law. Only a prophet could make the pilgrimage a religious obligation, and only a prophet make permissible that which was previously forbidden (for example, the dietary laws of the Jews).

[865] Both vicegerent (*khalifah*) and *imam* both refer to the person who received from God.

[866] He is talking here about the transmission of the *hadith* and *sunnah*, which has an entire science of textual and historical criticism attached to it. "According to its meaning," refers to a tradition that does not convey the exact words of the Prophet but which will have the same meaning. Ibn al-'Arabi is arguing that there is a margin of error in the traditions such that a spiritual vicegerent can contradict something that is found explicitly in the tradition if such a contradiction is based upon a special unveiling to him.

a single revelation. We know absolutely that when revelation descends it does so as one amongst these several points of view, and *it* is the Divine Judgment. Anything else, even if it is affirmed by the Real, is law that is affirmed in order to take burden off this community, and in order for it to have wide scope in the domain of judgment.[867]

As for the Prophet's saying, upon him be peace, "If allegiance is given to two vicegerents, kill the other among them,"[868]—(This refers to the vicegerency of the outward, that of the sword. Even if the two are in agreement, one of them must be killed, unlike the case of spiritual$_m$ vicegerency, in which there is no killing. This killing is related concerning only this vicegerent of the outward. If he is just, he is the vicegerent of God's Messenger.[869])—it has to do with that basic judgment by which it is imagined that there are two divinities: *Were there divinities in earth and heaven other than God, they would surely go to ruin*,[870] that is, even if they were to agree with one another.[871] By implication we know that if they were to disagree the decision of one of them would be carried out. The one who carries out his decision is the divinity in reality, and the one who does not carry out his decision is not a divinity.[872] We therefore know that every decision carried out in our day in the world is that of God, glorified and majestic be He, even if it goes against the judgment established in the outward entity we call Law, since in reality there is no judgment that is not God's. What actually happens in the world is determined by the Divine Will, not the established Law, even though its establishment stems from the Will. For this reason, it carries out its establishment only. In its regard what belongs to the Will is its establishment, not the acts based on what is transmitted therein.[873] The authority of the Will is great, and because of this Abu Talib[874] considered it the Throne of the Essence, because in itself it[875] necessitates determination. Nothing occurs in

[867] The end result of much of the transmitted traditions, together with the various ways of interpreting them (the major legal schools each have slightly different methods of juridical reasoning) is occasional disagreement as to a given ruling concerning a religious practice or a particular law. For example, followers of the Hanafi school follow its rulings, while the followers of the Maliki school follow theirs. One school may believe that touching a dog ruins one's ablutions, while the other does not believe so. Only one of these can be right in the ultimate sense, although this kind of latitude in judgment ("wide scope in the domain of judgment") is part and parcel of the universality of the Shari'ah. The Divine Judgment will be revealed again in all its fullness when Jesus returns to the world.

[868] Muslim 33:61

[869] The just man is he who has the rightful claim to be the vicegerent of the Prophet. There can be only one temporal authority, but there can be innumerable spiritual authorities.

[870] 21:22

[871] That is to say, an analogy can be made between the inevitable conflict between two people claiming the same position of power and the absurdity of two divinities.

[872] Hypothetically, if there were two divinities and they disagreed over something, there could be only one outcome, and that whose decision was cancelled out could not be a divinity, since a divinity must be all-powerful.

[873] That is, the precepts transmitted in the Law.

[874] Abu Talib al-Makki, Sufi, theologian, and author of *Qut al-Qulub*, d. 996. Kahhalah, 11:27.

[875] That is, Will.

existence or disappears from it outside of the Will.[876] When the Divine Command is opposed in what we call 'disobedience', this is only the Command by intermediary, not the Command of bringing into being.[877] With respect to the Will, no one ever goes against God in anything one does. Disobedience occurs with respect to the Command by intermediary, so understand. In reality, the Command of the Will is concerned solely with the existentiation of the act itself, not with the one who carried it out, it being therefore impossible that it[878] should not be. However, in some specific situation there is a moment called contradiction to God's Command, as well as one which is called conformity and obedience to God's Command. Upon them depends the language of praise or of censure, as a function of what it is.[879]

Now, since reality in itself is as we have established it to be, the final end of creation is happiness in its diverse kinds. He spoke of this station, saying that, *My Mercy encompasseth everything*,[880] and that it outstrips the Divine Anger.[881] That which outstrips is prior. When that which is determined by the posterior[882] comes into contact with it,[883] the prior determines it and grants it Mercy, since it is outstripped by none other.[884] This is the meaning of His Mercy outstripping His Anger: that it may determine what joins with it, for it stands at the final end, and all are sojourners to the final end, and so there must needs be a joining with it. There must needs be a joining with Mercy and a separation from Anger, and thus it[885] has the determination in everything that joins with it—commensurate with what is accorded by the state of that which joins with it.[886]

Whoso possesses understanding witnesses what we say
And if he understands not, yet he receives from us[887]

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[876] This passage is similar in content to the discussion of will near the end of the Ringstone of Jacob.
[877] The Command by intermediary (*al-amr bi'l-wasitah*) is the command through the Law, the command of prescription and prohibition. The intermediary is the revelation through the Quran and the Prophet. The Command of bringing into being (*al-amr al-takwini*) is the ontological emanation of existence upon the immutable identities.
[878] That is, the act.
[879] From the perspective of the Command by intermediary there is the possibility of obedience and disobedience, because this Command does not bestow being. Rather, its very essence is to allow the answerable person's will to be the decisive factor.
[880] 7:156
[881] A reference to the tradition, "Verily, Mercy overcomes My wrath." Bukhari 59:1. See Graham, p. 184.
[882] Mercy is prior and Anger is posterior, since Mercy outstrips Anger. That which is determined by the posterior is the object of Divine Anger.
[883] That is, with the outstripper, i.e. Mercy.
[884] The prior is Mercy, which overcomes the determination of Anger when this Mercy comes into contact with the object of that Anger.
[885] That is, Mercy.
[886] All will not be touched by Mercy in the same way. Some will receive it in Paradise, while others will receive it even in Hell, as was discussed in the final poem in the Ringstone of Ishmael.
[887] The difference here is that between one to whom things are unveiled and another for whom they are not, but who has faith.

Naught is there but that we have said, so rely
On it, and in your state be with it as we are
What we have rehearsed unto you is from Him to us
What we have given unto you from us is from us to you

As for the softening of iron,[888] hard hearts are softened by rebuke and threats the way iron is softened by fire. The difficulty lies in hearts harder than stone, for stone is broken and calcified by fire, not softened. Iron was softened for him but to make protective armor, a sign from God. That is to say, nothing can be protected except by means of itself. By means of armor one protects against spearheads, swords, knives, and arrowheads. You thus utilize iron to guard against iron. The Law of Muhammad brought us, "I seek refuge in Thee from Thee,"[889] so understand. This is the spirit of the softening of iron, for He is the Avenger, the Compassionate.[890] And God granteth success.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Soul in the Word of Jonah

Know that the makeup of man, in its perfection of spirit, body, and soul, was created by God in His Image. None but He who created it can undertake to undo its formation, which will take place either by his own Hand or by His Command;[891] this is always so. Whosoever undertakes to do so without God's Command has wronged his own soul and has overstepped the limits God set on its rights, and has endeavored to tear down what God has commanded to be put up. Know that kindness for God's slaves deserves more care than does one's zeal for God. David wished to build the Sacred House, and did so several times. Each time it was completed it would be destroyed. He lamented of this to God, and God revealed to him that, "This House of Mine shall not rise by the hands of bloodletters." David said, "O Lord, was that not in Thy Path?" He said, "Indeed! But were they not My slaves?" Then he said, "O Lord, may it be built by the hands of one who comes from me." God revealed to him that, "Thy son, Solomon, shall build it." This story speaks to having the proper regard for this makeup of man, and that maintaining it takes precedence over destroying it. Do you not see that God has made the poll-tax[892] and peaceful co-

[888] A reference to the verse, *And We softened for him iron: 'Fashion wide coats of mail, and measure well the links.'* (34:10)
[889] Muslim 4:222, which reads fully, "I seek refuge in Thy pardon from Thy punishment. I seek refuge in Thy good-pleasure from Thy wrath. I seek refuge in Thee from Thee."
[890] God softened iron to protect against iron, and God softens hearts through severity to protect them from severity. This is another way in which Mercy takes precedence over Anger, because Anger then becomes a mode of Mercy which softens the heart and makes it that much more receptive to Mercy.
[891] That is, with or without intermediary.
[892] The *jizya* or special tax levied against non-Muslims living in Islamic lands.

existence our obligation regarding the enemies of the religion, saying, *And if they incline to peace, do thou incline to it; and put thy trust in God*?[893] Do you not see, in the case of one against whom retaliation has become necessary,[894] that the taking of blood-money or pardon is prescribed for the next of kin, and that if the next of kin refuses, that only then is he killed? When the kin are united in their opposition, with one of them in favor of blood-money or pardon—the remainder of the kin wanting nothing but death—witness how He, glorified be He, preserves the act of pardon and chooses it over those who did not pardon, with the result that the offender is not killed in retaliation. Do you not see that the Prophet, upon him be peace, said of the man of the belt that if he killed him he would have been the same as him?[895] Do you not see Him saying, *The recompense of evil is evil the like of it*.[896] He made retaliation an evil, meaning that the act is evil even though it is prescribed.[897] *But whoso pardons and puts things right, his wage falls upon God*, for he is His image. Whosoever pardons someone and refrains from killing him will have his wage fall upon He whose image he is. Such is more worthy, for He made him for Himself. He is only manifest through the Name the Manifest by means of his existence, and so whosoever guards him guards the Real.[898]

One does not lay blame upon man in himself; one lays blame only upon his act. His act is not himself. Our discourse is concerned with his very self, for there is no act that does not belong to God. Although this is so, some are blamed and some praised.[899] To speak of blame based on some purpose is blameworthy in God's sight. Only that is blameworthy which is made blameworthy by the Law. Blameworthiness in the Law is part of a wisdom known to God or to those taught by God.[900] Remember that retaliation was prescribed for the benefit and continuation of this species, and as a deterrent for one who would transgress the limits set down for it by God. *In retaliation there is life for you, men possessed of minds*.[901] These latter are the Folk of the kernels of things, who have come to discover the secrets of the Divine

[893] 8:61
[894] That is to say, in the case of murder.
[895] There was an incident where a man found the belt of his murdered kinsman in the hand of another man, and intended to kill him. To this the Prophet said, "If he kills him, he will be a wrongdoer like him."
[896] 42:40
[897] That is, even though it is part of the *Shari'ah*.
[898] God is the Manifest by manifesting Himself through man's existence, which is to say that God can be the Outward or the Manifest only *in* the realm of manifestation.
[899] Man qua man is not evil, but his actions in the world may be. As has been mentioned many times before, the contrast between good and evil only appears when one looks at reality from the point of view of the world, i.e. what is other than God. From the point of view of the Supreme Self, all acts are God's. When Ibn al-'Arabi says, "Although this is so…" what he means is that although from the Self's point of view all acts belong to God, from the point of view of the world there are good actions and evil actions, hence actions that are praised and those that are blamed.
[900] That is to say, any judgment about evil must be made based on objective criteria provided by the religion. A thing is not evil simply because it goes against our personal desires.
[901] 2:179

Laws and of Wisdom.[902]

Now, you know that God guards this makeup and maintains it, and so it is more right that you should protect it, because there is a joy for you in this. So long as man lives, there is hope for him that he will attain to the perfection for which he was created. Whosoever endeavors to destroy him endeavors to prevent him from reaching that for which he was created.[903]

How beautiful are the words of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, "Shall I not tell you of what is better for you, better than meeting the enemy, beheading them, they beheading you? The Remembrance of God."[904] This means that none know the measure of this makeup of man except one who remembers God in the way it has been sought of him. God keeps company[905] with him who remembers Him; the One with whom he keeps company is witnessed by this rememberer. When the rememberer does not witness the Real who is his intimate, he is not a rememberer. The remembrance of God penetrates the whole of a slave,[906] not one who remembers Him with his tongue only. At that moment the Real keeps company only with the tongue. The tongue sees Him while the man does not see Him with that by which he sees, and which is sight.[907] Understand this mystery of the unmindful person's remembrance. The rememberer *in* the unmindful person is without doubt present, and the One remembered keeps his company, and he sees Him. The unmindful person, in the measure of his unmindfulness, is not a rememberer. He does not keep company with the unmindful. Man is multiple; he is not unified in himself. God is in Himself one, and is multiple through the Divine Names.[908] Observe the case of man, who is multiple with respect to his parts: the remembrance of one part does not necessarily follow from the remembrance of some other part. The Real keeps company with the part of him that remembers, while the others are characterized as being unmindful of the remembrance.[909] There must be a part of man by which he remembers, and with which the Real keeps company, protecting the

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[902] *Men possesses of minds* could be translated literally as "Men of kernels" (*ulu'l-albab*), which is the same word used for "kernels" in this sentence (*albab*).

[903] That is, the purpose for which man was created is to journey to God through this world, and to achieve perfection through his actions and his growth here. Desiring to kill a man (based upon personal wishes) is tantamount to desiring that he not achieve the perfection for which he was created.

[904] This is a paraphrase of a tradition in Tirmidhi (See *Riyad al-Salihin*, 1441).

[905] I translate *jalis* (from the verb *jalasa*, "to sit") as the verb "keeps company" although it literally means one with whom one sits together.

[906] That is, of a true slave.

[907] That is, his spiritual faculty by which he can achieve true vision (*ru'yah*).

[908] One could also translate the preceding as, "…he (man) is not a unified identity. God is one in identity and multiple through the Divine Names."

[909] There is a famous verse of Rumi which reads, "Remember God until your big toe says, '*Allah*, *Allah*.'" True *dhikr* penetrates the whole of man, not only part. Man can remember God in the center of his deepest heart as well as in his body. All of his soul's faculties must be unified into the act of remembering God, and this includes his will, his intelligence, and his love. It is this integration of soul which is the sole aim of Tasawwuf.

remainder of the parts through solicitude.[910]

The Real does not bring about the destruction of this makeup through what one calls 'death'. It is not a bringing to non-existence, but a separation. He takes him unto Himself; all that is meant is that the Real takes him unto Himself, *And to Him the whole affair shall be returned*.[911] When He takes him unto Himself He fashions for him a different compounded body, of a kind proper to the abode to which he is being conveyed: the abode of abiding for the existence of that which is in equilibrium. He shall never die, that is, his parts shall never be disjoined.[912]

As for the Folk of the Fire, their final end is enjoyment, but enjoyment in the fire. It must needs be that the fire's form, after the cessation of the period of punishment, be coolness and peace for those therein. This is their enjoyment.[913] The enjoyment of the Folk of the Fire, after the fulfillment of their obligations, is like the enjoyment experienced by the Friend of God when he was thrown into the fire. He suffered from the sight of it, upon him be peace, and also from what he was used to thinking, having acknowledged it to be a form that would harm any animal that came close to it. He did not know the intent of God for him within it or from it. After finding this torment he found coolness and peace for himself while witnessing the

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[910] I interpret this to mean that as a fragmented soul man can remember in one respect and be unmindful in another, but since man is from another point of view a unified whole, there is a blessing and protection that passes on to the whole of the human being when one part if engaged in remembrance.

[911] 11:123

[912] When man leaves this world he leaves his earthly body, but in the next world he acquires a new body, one which is as it were made of the stuff of that world. As opposed to what happens in this world, the kind of body one will come to inhabit in the next world is determined by the nature of the soul. This is ultimately how a Sufi such as Ibn al-'Arabi understands the various experiences of pleasure and torment in the afterlife. The soul itself fashions its own bodily existence (not physical body but the subtle body of the world of the *barzakh*, the world of imagination). In the Hereafter a malicious soul no longer has the anchoring of an autonomous physical body and outwardly suffers the pains and torments his soul creates through its own inner evil. The Sufi interprets the traditions that speak of men being resurrected as various kinds of animals in light of this doctrine of the subtle body, and it is an important dimension of their argument against certain doctrines of transmigration. Indeed, the soul does acquire another body, but this body exists by virtue of the fact that in the next world the soul actualizes its power of creation and ineluctably manifests, in a concrete way, what it is. Thus the traditions speak of men who appear as pigs, or predatory beasts, and the like, because their souls are warped and as a result the forms which they manifest in the Hereafter are less than human. The Sufis and philosophers such as Mulla Sadra accept 'transmigration' if it is understood in this way. They do not accept the doctrine which states that a soul begins the entire process of development again in another body, because from their point of view this necessitates that all the potentialities actualized in life are erased, and all the lessons learned forgotten. Indeed, the 'standing' on the Day of Judgment and the torments people suffer on that Day are sometimes spoken of in the traditions in terms of many thousands of years, corresponding to the lifetimes of transmigration spoken of in other doctrines. Moreover, according to this doctrine there is no reason why the body cannot change many times as the soul becomes purified by its torments (which can be seen as so many 'lives'). What is crucial is that it is a different kind of body in a different kind of world, and the relationship between the soul and the body it fashions from within itself is in a sense the inversion of the soul-body relationship in this world, where it is the experience of the body that helps 'fashion' the soul.

[913] Again, refer to the commentary upon the final poem of the Ringstone of Ishmael.

coloring[914] form.[915] It was fire for the eyes of the people. A single thing was variegated in the eyes of the onlookers. Such is the divine self-disclosure. If you so wish you can say that God discloses Himself in this way, and if you so wish you can say that the world, when it is looked upon and contemplated, is a likeness of the Real in self-disclosure. It becomes variegated in the eyes of the onlookers in accordance with the temperament of the onlookers, or the temperaments of the onlookers are variegated in accordance with the variegation of the self-disclosure. Both are permissible as concerns the realities of things.[916]

If the dead or the slain—that is, whether they be those who die or are slain—did not, when they died or were slain, return to God, God would not bring out the death of anyone, nor would He prescribe their being slain. All are in His grip. There is no loss when it comes to Him. He prescribed killing and decided that there would be death, knowing that His slave cannot escape Him. He returns to Him. And still there are His Words, *And to Him the whole affair shall be returned*.[917] That is, there is an act of disposal therein, and it is He who disposes.[918] No thing comes out from Him that is not identical with Him. Indeed, His Selfhood is that very thing, and it is He who grants it the unveiling in His Words, *And to Him the whole affair shall be returned*.[919]

Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Invisible in the Word of Job

Know that the mystery of life lies in water. It is the principle of the elements and the pillars,[920] and for this reason God made *from water every living thing*.[921]

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[914] There are two readings given for this word, one being *lawniyyah* (pertaining to color) and the other *nariyyah* (pertaining to fire). The point is the same regardless, namely that it appeared as fire although it was coolness and peace for Abraham.

[915] Abraham would have been tormented by the very sight of the fire into which he would be cast, at that moment not knowing what God intended by it.

[916] This is a commentary upon the two types of self-disclosure, invisible (*al-ghayb*) and visible (*al-shahadah*). From one point of view you can say that the same thing was seen as being different things because it was made manifest differently to each them, or you can say that the same thing appeared differently because of what each viewer's predisposition allowed him to see. The first symbolizes God's self-disclosure as a multiplicity to the eyes of men, while the second symbolizes the oneness of Him who is seen and the differentiation of how He is seen by virtue of the preparedness of different hearts. The Holy Emanation or visible self-disclosure (*al-fayd al-muqaddas*, *tajalli al-shahadah*) manifests the multiplicity of the world concretely, while the Holiest Emanation or invisible self-disclosure (*al-fayd al-aqdas*, *tajalli al-ghayb*) grants the preparedness of the heart in witnessing the one Self-discloser, who is seen differently by different hearts.

[917] 11:123

[918] When a person dies, it is not an empty act of coming to nothing, but a purposeful separation whose ultimate agent is God Himself. If death were an absolute end, God would not allow death to take place, for it would rob man's creation of its purposefulness.

[919] That is, it is God who grants the understanding of the mystery of this verse.

[920] The elements (*'unsur*) are air, fire, earth, and water, while the pillars (*rukn*) are those qualities from which the elements are composed, namely hot, cold, dry, and moist.

[921] 21:30

There is no thing that does not live, and there is no thing that does not glorify by the praises of God, although we can only understand their glorification through a divine unveiling. Only something that lives can glorify, and thus everything lives, and everything has water as its principle.[922] Do you not see how the Throne is above water, for it was existentiated out of it, floating upon it and protected by it from below?[923] Such is the case for man, who was created a slave by God, and who then became prideful against his Lord and arrogated himself against Him. Even so, He protects him from below, glorified be He, with a view to the exaltedness of this slave who is ignorant of himself, spoken of in his words, upon him be peace, "If you were to lower a rope, it would alight upon God."[924] He pointed out the relationship to Him of what is below, as there is a relationship of what is above in His Words, *They fear their Lord above them*,[925] and, *He is the Omnipotent over His slaves*.[926] The above and the below are His. For this reason the six directions are manifest only in man, who is made in the image of the Merciful.[927]

There is no nourisher but God. He said of a certain group, *Had they established the Torah and the Gospel*,[928] and then made it non-specific and general, saying, *and what was sent down to them from their Lord*—(every determination that descends upon a messenger or an inspired person[929] is included in, *and what was sent*

[922] Here the water of life symbolizes the very Quality of Life which flows in all things and from which all things originate. Recall that Ibn al-'Arabi calls all things 'animals' because all things are alive and animals are the most direct manifestation of what we usually associate with life. Ordinary water is indeed the principle of what we usually consider to possess life, namely plants and animals. Our conception, however, is limited, for all things that exist possess life. The primal Water is to all living beings—that is, all existence—as common water is to plants and animals as we usually conceive of them. The Self's very Life, which grants sustenance to the very existence of things, is thus symbolized by water, whose nourishing, powerful, receptive, and plastic qualities make it a particularly apt symbol for the Divine Life.

[923] A manifestation of the Divine Life, which is none other than the Divine Life for the world, is the Breath of the All-Merciful. It is upon this Breath that all things come to exist, including the Throne which is the pinnacle of the cosmos.

[924] Amhad b. Hanbal 2:379

[925] 16:50

[926] 6:61

[927] It is common enough to speak of God as being above man, but God is also below him, and for that matter before, behind, to the left, and to the right. The prophet's saying regarding the rope points to the fact that God relationship with things is not only one of height but also of depth. Qaysari speaks of 'below' as symbolizing the inward or the hidden. "The six directions" represent the totality of Divine Qualities, and as the Image of God in the world, man alone manifests this totality.

[928] 5:66

[929] *Mulham*, from *ilham* or "inspiration". There is traditionally a distinction made between revelation properly speaking (*wahy*), such as the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet, and inspiration, which is how saints receive what they receive from God. One way of distinguishing them is to say that revelation is granted through the intermediation of an angel, most notably the archangel Gabriel as in the case of the Prophet. Inspiration comes to man by that unmediated direct link that God has with every being. An inspiration is received from within, while revelation is received from without. The fact that revelation (*wahy*) comes from outside of the messenger or prophet is part of its more universal significance, which is to say that the Quran was intended for all Muslims, not only the Prophet.

down to them from their Lord)*—they would have eaten what was above them*, which is the source of food from above which is attributed to Him, *and what was beneath their feet,* which is the source of food from below which He attributed to Himself on the tongue of His Messenger, who interprets for Him, may God bless him and grant him peace.[930]

Were the Throne not upon the water, its existence would not be protected, for it is through life that a living thing is protected. Do you not see that when a living thing dies an ordinary death, its order's parts are undone and its faculties disappear from that particular order?[931]

God said to Job, *Stamp thy foot. This is a laving-place,* that is, it is water, *cool.* This took place due to the excessive fever of his sickness; God soothed him with the coolness of the water. This is why medicine is the reduction of excess and supplementing of deficiency. The goal is to seek equilibrium. There is no path to it; one can only approach it. We say there is no path to it—that is, to equilibrium—only because the realities and witnessing perpetually grant existentiation with the Breaths. There is no bringing into being that does not result from some inclination, which in nature is called imbalance or decay. As regards the Real it is a Will, which is the

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Having said that, the Sufis would also say that the Prophet received inspiration (*ilham*) by virtue of being the highest saint among saints.

In revelation, the angel assumes control of a certain amount of form, which is to say that this being which is un-mattered by definition manifests itself in a corporeal or imaginational body. The Prophet receives the Quran with all its levels of meaning at once, because his inward and outward faculties are all completely awake and take in all that the angel has to deliver. It is not only that the Prophet saw a bodily manifestation that claimed to be an angel. He saw the angel both in its principle as well as in its manifestation, and heard the Quran with his spiritual ear. The Prophet's purity of soul, his being "unlettered", meant that the non-formal spirit of the Quran could manifest in form without any disruption from a noisy soul, and from the reverse point of view he could see the meanings in the letters and sounds as if through a glass, because the Book would be revealed as a whole with all of its levels of meaning.

Inspiration is a special kind of gift given by God to soul, a gift that allows the soul to be aware of something it was not aware of before, or to integrate disparate elements of his emotions or thoughts into a special insight. It can also be more specific than that, and take the form of poetry, or a decision that needs to be made, or a burst of courage. In revelation, the formal manifestation is perfectly determined by the formless essence, which means that the letters and words manifest a spirit, but manifest it perfectly without possibility of mis-transmission. This happens by virtue of the perfection of the giver and the perfection of the receiver. Inspiration comes through the very soul of him who is inspired. The soul can be seen as a substance that is luminous on the one hand and illumined on the other. The light it shines on the world and on itself symbolizes the strength of the soul's being. A more luminous soul sees more, knows more, loves more, feels more. In inspiration God intensifies the light, as it were, and allows the soul, if only for a moment, to see farther or to know more deeply. The greater light brings into view deeper levels of wholeness and interconnectedness within one's soul and out in the world. Such an illumination can result in a special kind of creativity, or the solution to a vexing problem, or even falling in love. An inspiration is a kind of special wakefulness God grants in order to lead us in a particular direction. It is an activation or intensification of the spirit, granted by God, which filters into the soul and takes on form.

[930] God nourishes from all directions, for He is present in all directions, as indicated by the aforementioned saying of the Prophet.

inclination towards a desired thing to the exclusion of another. Equilibrium allows equality in all things, but this does not actually occur. Because of this He kept us from being determined by equilibrium.[932]

In the Prophet's divine teaching the Real is described to us as being well-pleased and angry, and as having other Qualities. Good-pleasure diminishes anger, whilst anger diminishes the good-pleasure regarding the one with whom one is well-pleased. Equilibrium is that good-pleasure and anger should be equal.[933] The angry one does not show anger for the one with whom he is angry while he is well-pleased with him. He is described as having one of the determinations as it concerns such a one; it is an inclining. The well-pleased one does not show good-pleasure to the one with whom he is well-pleased while he is angry with him. He is described as having one of the determinations as it concerns such a one; it is an inclining. We only say this because of those who think that the anger of God shall never cease for the Folk of the Fire, supposing it to be perpetual and eternal. They do not have that determination of good-pleasure from God. If it is as we have said—if the final end of the Folk of the Fire is cessation of their sufferings and if the Fire will become still—then this is good-pleasure, and the point is made:[934] anger ceases to due the cessation of the torments, since anger is identical with suffering, if you understand. Whosoever is angry has been harmed, and vengeance is sought, by means of suffering, against the object of the anger only so that the angry one will be satisfied, conveying the suffering he undergoes to the one with whom he is angry. The Real, when you isolate Him from the world, is greatly exalted above this quality thus defined.[935]

Now, since the Real is the selfhood of the world, all determinations become

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[931] If we take water to symbolize the Life bestowed by the Breath of the All-Merciful, then the Throne would be undone just as the physical body is undone when its soul leaves it.

[932] In the world of nature, a change in state (spoken of here as *takwin* or "bringing into being") results from some sort of imbalance or process of decay. Inclination (*mayl*) could also have been rendered "tilt" or "propensity". In the case of God Ibn al-'Arabi is speaking about the equilibrium between existence and non-existence, which is obviously not an equilibrium as between different elements of nature, since there is no commensurability between being and non-being. The entire world is sustained by an imbalance, i.e. God's Will to create and maintain all beings upon the Breath of the All-Merciful. The situation of an existent things is not like that of an object balanced on a point, for such a thing can be left alone in its equilibrium. Were God to leave us alone in our own equilibrium for moment we would turn to nothing. We only exist because of His 'inclination' towards our creation.

[933] Recall that for Ibn al-'Arabi equilibrium is not possible in existence. Such is eminently the case for Mercy and Anger, for Mercy overcomes Anger and is the ontological root of Anger. Thus there can be no real balance between the two.

[934] This sentence is a translation of highly displaced Arabic. It is impossible to render even the order of the phrases literally. The English is based on the comments of Qaysari, who interprets the phrasing, "If it is as we have said…the point is made," as a rhetorical device, since Ibn al-'Arabi does not really question the position he expounds here.

[935] That is to say, although it is true that God is the selfhood of all things, even those being that seek revenge out of petty satisfaction, His Vengeance is of a different kind. The Divine principle of vengeance is like the divine principle of anger: it is part of a higher good and is entailed by the fullness of the Divine Mercy, unlike those in the world who seek personal vengeance with no real good in mind.

manifest from Him and in Him, spoken of in His Words, *And to Him the whole affair shall be returned*,[936] as reality and unveiling, and, *So worship Him and trust in Him*, as veil and covering. Within contingency there is nothing more wondrous than this world, for it is the image of the All-Merciful, existentiated by God, which is to say, His existence becomes manifest, transcendent is He, through the manifestation of the world, just as man is manifest through the existence of natural form. We are His manifest form, and His Selfhood is the spirit of this form, governing it. There is no governance except in Him, just as there is none[937] except from Him. He is the First in meaning, and the Last in form. He is the Manifest through the changing of determinations and states, and the Hidden through governance, *and He knoweth everything*.[938] He is Witness over everything, that He may be known through witnessing, not thought. Such is knowledge by taste: it is not based on thought and it is true knowledge. Anything else is conjecture and surmise and is not knowledge at all.[939]

The water was for Job to drink, in order to end the sufferings of thirst, which came from the distress and affliction by which Satan—that is, the distance from realities which keeps one from perceiving them *as they are* and from being in a place of closeness by perceiving them—touched him.[940] All that is witnessed is near to the eye, even if it is distant spatially. Sight attaches to it by virtue of its witnessing of it. Without that connection one would not witness it. Or it can equally well be said that what is witnessed attaches to sight.[941] This is the nearness between sight and what is seen. Because of this Job used the first person concerning the 'touching'; he attributed it to Satan although there is closeness in touching, saying, "The distant is close to me because of its determination of me." He knew that distance and closeness are relative matters. They are relationships with no concrete existence, though their determinations are well-established in the distant and the near.

Know that the Mystery of God in Job, which He has given to us as a lesson and as a record of his states, is read by this community of Muhammad so that it may

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[936] 11:123

[937] That is, no governance.

[938] 57:3, and here we have another commentary upon the Names the First, the Last, the Inward, and the Outward. As the deepest selfhood of all things, God is the spirit that governs and manages form, the spirit coming 'first' and the form 'last'. And so too is the spirit inward or hidden in relation to the multiple states which are outward or manifest.

[939] If God is the Witness, then as His image man has the possibility for witnessing God directly. The truest knowledge is tasted or witnessed knowledge, which surpasses theoretical knowledge to such a degree that in comparison, "It is not knowledge at all."

[940] *"Satan has touched me with weariness and chastisement."* (38:41) Qaysari states that *Shaytan* (Satan) is the *fay'al* form of *shatana*, "to be distant", thus identifying the Devil with the state of being far from God. Again the water represents the Water of Life, which nourishes the heart of man and relieves him of the distress of being far away from God.

[941] He is here simply stating two competing theories as to the nature of physical sight, one which states that the rays come into the eye from the object and the other that the eye sends out rays to the object.

know what is found therein and be ennobled by attaching itself to its custodian.[942] God praised Job for his patience, even though he called on Him to relieve his suffering. We know that when a slave calls upon God to relieve some pain it does not detract from his patience, nor from his being patient, nor from his being an excellent slave. Remember that He said, *He was a penitent*,[943] that is, he took recourse to God, not to occasions. When this happens,[944] the Real acts by means of an occasion, for the slave depends upon them. The occasions to end something are many, while the Occasioner is unique in identity. The slave's having recourse to the single identity, which causes the end of suffering by means of an occasion, should take precedence over having recourse to some specific occasion, which may not accord with God's knowledge of him. Such a one would then say, "God had not answered me," while having failed to call upon Him. Indeed, he will have inclined towards a specific occasion that was not called for by the time or the moment.[945] Job acted through the wisdom of God, since he was a prophet, knowing that patience—(Among the Tribe, patience is to keep the soul from complaining. In our view, this is not the definition of patience. Its definition is none other than keeping the soul from complaining to others besides God, not to God. The Tribe's conception has veiled them from the fact that the complaint does not take away from the complainer's contentment with the Decree; it only takes away from his contentment with what is decreed. We have not been addressed regarding contentment with what is decreed. The suffering consists in what is decreed; it is not identical with the Decree.[946])—in the form of keeping back the soul from complaining to God contains in itself a reinforcement of the Divine Severity. It is the ignorance of an individual, who does not call upon God to bring that painful thing to an end, while it is God who has visited this suffering upon his soul. Indeed, in the sight of a man of realization, it befits such a one to be humble and to ask God to bring an end to it for him; in the sight of a knower, a man of unveiling, this brings an end to it for the Divine. God has described Himself as being hurt, saying, *Those who hurt God and His Messenger*.[947] What greater hurt is there than that He should afflict you while you are heedless of Him or of some divine station, failing to know Him[948] such that you might take recourse to Him with a complaint to relieve you of it, your needfulness (which is your reality) holding true and the Real (since you are His manifest form) being relieved of that hurt through your act of asking to be relieved of it? Now, out of hunger some knowers weep, and those who have no taste of this science castigate them. The knower says, "He has

[942] That is, to Job who is the custodian of the mystery and the record of his states.
[943] 38:44
[944] That is, when one takes recourse to God.
[945] See note at the end of the Ringstone of Joseph for a discussion of occasions (*asbab*), p.***.
[946] "We have not been addressed regarding contentment with what is decreed," means that man has not been told not to complain over a specific thing decreed by God.
[947] 33:57
[948] This can be either "Him" or "it", the latter referring to the divine station.

made me hungry that I might weep." He is saying that, "He has only visited suffering upon me in order for me to ask Him to be relieved of it. This does not detract from my being patient." We know that patience is nothing more than to keep your soul from complaining to others besides God, and by others I mean a specific Face from among the Faces of God. God, the Real, has specified a particular Face from among the Faces of God, called the Face of the Selfhood. One calls on this Face for the relief of suffering, and not on the other Faces, which are called occasions.[949] They are none other than He, by virtue of the unfolding of reality. That the knower should ask the Real's Selfhood for the relief of some suffering does not veil him from the fact that all occasions are identical with Him in a certain respect.[950]

This is only a part of the path of those slaves of God who have *adab*, who are entrusted with God's mysteries, for God does have those in whom He places His trust. Only God knows them, and they know one another. We have advised thee, so act and ask of Him, glorified be He.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Majesty in the Word of John

This is the Wisdom of firstness as it concerns names. God gave him the name John, which is to say that the memory of Zachariah lives through him.[951] *No namesake have we given him aforetime*.[952] He took the actualization of that quality, which was possessed by those who came before and left children, and joined it to the name belonging to it. And thus He named him John, and his name lives on as does the knowledge of taste. The memory of Adam lived on through Seth, and the memory of Noah through Shem, and so it was for other prophets.[953] Before John,

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[949] It is true that all things manifest God, but that does not mean we are asking God for help when we seek aid from something in the world. By seeking relief in a particular occasion, i.e. some worldly object, one is choosing for oneself what the form of the relief will be, and which may not be what one needs or would really want. True wisdom is to pray to God Himself, and to trust in His Wisdom to answer the prayer in the best way. "The Face of the Selfhood" means that we as creatures call upon the Supreme Self insofar as It has given us a Face to which we might pray. Then, when God sees fit, He will answer the prayer through one of His 'occasions' or manifestations. Ibn al-'Arabi says one should be humble and ask, for it is a form of pride for man to refuse to pray when God has given him this means.

[950] In this seminal passage Ibn al-'Arabi makes clear that he is not a fatalist and that his doctrine of archetypes is much more nuanced than some might believe. The prayer to God for the relief of suffering can serve as a living three-dimensional benchmark against the cold two-dimensional understanding of destiny into which one can easily fall in reading Ibn al-'Arabi. Prayer is a living spark in the center of man that could never be crushed into a metaphysical doctrine, no matter how grand and embracing that doctrine may be. It is through that living encounter with God, prayer, that all the thoughts and concepts which we use as stepping stones gradually fall away into a mist of inadequacy.

[951] John in Arabic is *Yahya*, which is a homonym for the verb *yahya* or "he lives".

[952] 19:7

[953] *Dhikr* ("memory") has the sense of one's renown or reputation as well as remembrance, as in 94:4, *Did We not exalt thy fame?* (*wa rafa'na laka dhikrak*). The memory or renown of Zachariah would live on through John because he was his son, as was the case for the other prophets mentioned. But

God had not brought together one's proper name with its quality for anyone. He only did so for Zachariah, a solicitude from Him, since he said, *So give me, from Thee, a kinsman*. He placed the Real before the mention of his son, just as Asiyah placed the mention of the Neighbor before the Abode in her words, *"...with Thee a house in Paradise."*[954] God honored him by fulfilling his need. He gave him the name of his quality, so that his name might be a reminder of what His prophet had sought of Him, because he preferred, upon him be peace, that the remembrance of God should abide in his progeny, for the son is the secret of his father.[955] Thus he said, *who shall be my inheritor and the inheritor of the House of Jacob*.[956] For these men there is no inheritance other than the station of the Remembrance of God and that of calling Him.

He then offered him glad-tidings of the peace He had given him, *the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive*.[957] He used the quality of Life, which is his name,[958] and told of the peace He had given him. His words are truthful and certain. Even though the words of the Spirit,[959] *Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive*,[960] are more perfect in terms of union, those we are considering are more perfect in terms of union *and* creed, and better in terms of exegesis.[961] For Jesus, the miracle lay only in his speaking; his intellect was enabled and perfected at that moment in which God made him speak. It does not necessarily follow that one who is made able to speak—whatever be his state—be truthful in what he says, as opposed to one who witnesses it,[962] as was the case with John. From this point of view, since Divine solicitude accompanied it, the Real's greeting of peace upon John was more exalted than was Jesus' greeting of peace upon himself, even though the context shows his nearness to God and his veracity in it, having spoken in the cradle for the purpose of proving his mother's innocence. It was one of two testimonies, the other testimony being the

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before him no one had possessed this quality of "living on" coupled with a name that had that literal meaning. The "knowledge of taste" that is mentioned coincides with what comes later in the paragraph, "For these men there is no inheritance other than the station of the Remembrance of God." This last phrase is *dhikr Allah*, with the same word used for "memory" above.

[954] A reference to 66:19 where Asiyah the wife of Pharaoh says, *"My Lord, build for me with Thee a house in Paradise."*

[955] The child as the secret of the father was discussed in the Ringstone of Seth, p.***.

[956] 19:6

[957] 19:15

[958] That is, John's name.

[959] Referring to Jesus' words as an infant.

[960] 19:33

[961] I think the phrase "more perfect" need not be taken too literally. The wording of Jesus was perfect in the sense of expressing man's relationship with God from the point of view *of* a man, but being in the first person it raises certain difficulties not encountered when these same words are spoken by God. That is why the words regarding John are perfect in union *and* creed together, creed (*i'tiqad*) referring to the belief that one formulates about it. Also, it is better in terms of interpretation because Jesus' words stand in more need of spiritual exegesis (*ta'wil*).

[962] That is, witnesses what is said, meaning that it was said about him and not by him.

dried palm trunk dropping ripe dates without a male and without pollination,[963] just as Mary gave birth to Jesus without a male, without the usual union with a man as normally considered. If a prophet were to say, "My sign and my miracle is that this wall shall speak," and if the wall were to speak and say in its speaking, "You have lied. You are not the Messenger of God," the sign would still be valid, and by means of this it would be confirmed that such a one is the Messenger of God, and one would not take into account what the wall had said. Now since this possibility is contained in the words of Jesus, which were prompted by his mother's act of gesturing to him while he was in the cradle, God's greeting of peace upon John is more exalted in this respect. The purpose was to prove that he was God's slave, because there are those who say he is the Son of God and there are those who side with prophethood and say that he is God's slave; the fact of his speaking alone carried out this proof.[964] Whatever was left of that theoretical possibility remained until his truthfulness became manifest in the future, concerning everything of which he had spoken in the cradle. That to which we have alluded has now been affirmed.[965]

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Possessing in the Word of Zachariah

Know that God's Mercy encompasses everything in existence[966] and in determination, and that the existence of anger stems from God's Mercy upon anger. His Mercy surpasses His Anger,[967] which is to say that mercy's attribution to Him surpasses anger's attribution to Him. Now, since every identity has an existence that it seeks from God, His Mercy applies universally to each identity. Through His Mercy, by which He shows mercy upon each, He accepts their desire for the existence of their identities, and so existentiates them. For this reason we say that God's Mercy encompasses everything in existence and determination.

The Divine Names are things, and come from a single identity. What is first encompassed by God's Mercy is the thingness of that identity which existentiates Mercy through Mercy. So the first thing[968] encompassed by Mercy is itself; then the

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[963] *'Shake also to thee the palm-trunk, and there shall come tumbling upon thee dates fresh and ripe.'* (19:20) This was a dried date palm in the midst of winter according to the exegetes.

[964] His words were, *"Lo, I am God's slave; God has given me the Book, and made me a Prophet."* (19:30)

[965] The so-called theoretical possibility is that the content of what Jesus said as an infant was not true, although the fact of the infant speaking was sufficient to exonerate Mary. Ibn al-'Arabi then says that any possible doubts were allayed later in Jesus' life when his deeds showed his first words to be true.

[966] That is, concretely.

[967] Cf. Chapter on David.

[968] At first sight there appears to be a contradiction as to what Mercy first encompasses. Ibn al-'Arabi says, "What is first encompassed…is the thingness of that identity which existentiates Mercy through Mercy." Then he says, "So the first thing encompassed by Mercy is itself." Qaysari explains that the former sentence refers to the priority the Name the All-Merciful (*al-Rahman*) has over all other Names, being a condition and ontological root for all of them. It is the latter sentence which in an unqualified sense states where the act of Mercy begins.

thingness indicated; then the thingness of all existents that exist, which have no end, neither in this lower world nor in the Hereafter, neither in accident nor in substance, neither in the compounded nor in the simple.[969] The attainment of some purpose or the agreeability with one's nature are not taken into account as far as it is concerned; indeed, what is agreeable and what is not are all encompassed by the Divine Mercy in existence.

We have said in the *Futuhat* that effects belong only to non-existents, not to existents, and that if they do belong to existents it is through the determination of a

[969] This is a difficult passage and it is not entirely clarified for me by the commentaries. If we begin with the conceptual hierarchy of God as Self, then God as Names and Qualities, followed by the immutable identities in God's Knowledge, then it seems to me that the passage can be understood in the following way: God is Mercy, for Mercy is the bestowal of being and God is being. But God is not only Being, for Being is opposite non-Being. God the Self is Beyond-Being, or perhaps it would be even more correct to say Beyond-Being-and-non-Being. It is Beyond-Being that grants being to Itself by becoming Being. That means that Beyond-Being already contains Being within itself. This is Mercy being the first thing encompassed by Mercy. Being is the first thing encompassed by the possibility of Being, which is intrinsic to Beyond-Being. In different language, the Self *is* Mercy as it is every other Quality. God as the Knower is not truly different than God the All-Merciful. To say that Mercy encompasses itself is a way of saying that *al-Rahman* knows Himself, and this act of knowing grants real being to the immutable identity of which *al-Rahman* is lord. This immutable identity of *al-Rahman* is the thingness mentioned here. Ibn al-'Arabi is quite clear that the Names are not things, for thingness implies existence and the Names are pure relationships and attributions. To give rise to the immutable identities is an act of Mercy. Then to give Mercy to this identity, and through which to give Mercy to all other identities. Recall that there is a true hierarchy of conditionality in the immutable identities as in the Qualities. There can be no other identities without the identity of which *al-Rahman* is lord. These to me seem to be the three steps involved here.

Thus to say that the first thing encompassed by Mercy is itself is a commentary upon the emanation of the immutable identities. It must be remembered that mercy is the bestowal of being, and the bestowal of being is mercy. It is in knowing Itself that the Self gives rise to the immutable identities, as was discussed extensively in the introduction. Through this eternal act of Knowledge the All-Merciful is given an immutable identity over which it (the All-Merciful) is lord, for it is through God knowing himself as the All-Merciful that the immutable identity corresponding to the All-Merciful is made real. This act is a mercy for the All-Merciful, giving it a locus of manifestation. Now, to call God *al-Rahman* (the All-Merciful) is to speak of the Divine Mercy precisely. There is not Divine Mercy on the one hand and the All-Merciful on the other. God *is* Mercy. For God to know and through His knowing to grant being is a part of the Divine Mercy and is a dimension of *al-Rahman*, but it is also through this same act that *al-Rahman* is given a subject over which to be lord, which is the immutable identity of *al-Rahman*. It is this immutable identity which is the "thingness" of the second sentence, for Divine Names are not things but attributions and relationships. When Mercy encompasses this immutable identity ("the thingness indicated") this refers to the Holy Emanation by which external existence is granted to an immutable identity. The existence granted to the immutable identity of *al-Rahman* is none other than all the mercy in the world. This immutable identity has no individual existent that is a manifestation of it. Rather, its manifestation runs through all beings and is a condition for their very existence, since external existence is a mercy and all mercy comes from *al-Rahman*, and *al-Rahman* manifests in the world through its own immutable identity. It is through Mercy reaching the immutable identity of Mercy that Mercy can then attach to the identities of all other things. As was mentioned in the introduction, within the Divine Names and hence within the immutable identities there is a hierarchy of dependence and correlativity. *Al-Rahman* stands at the summit of conditionality, for it is second only to the Name *Allah* and is synonymous with the Mercy that grants being to all things.

non-existent.[970] This is a rare knowledge and an uncommon matter, and only the men of imagination$_w$ know how to realize it, and in their sight it is based on taste. As for those for whom imagination$_w$ has no effect, they remain far removed from this matter.[971]

God's Mercy flows in beings
And runs its course through essences and identities
Mercy's superior rank, if thou comest to know it
By witnessing with meditation, is exalted

Anything Mercy remembers is happy, and there is nothing that is not remembered by Mercy. Mercy's remembrance of things is its very existentiation of them. Every existent is an object of mercy. Do not allow what you see of an afflicted person and what you believe regarding the torment of the Hereafter—which allows those who reside within it no outward glimpse—to veil you, my friend, from grasping what we have spoken of. Firstly, know that Mercy, as it concerns existentiation, applies universally. Through showing Mercy upon torments He existentiates torments.

Moreover, Mercy has an effect in two ways. There is its effect in itself, which consists of its existentiating every identity into an existent thing. It does not look to purpose or to the absence of purpose, nor to what is agreeable or what is disagreeable; it looks to the identity of every existent thing before its existence. Indeed, it sees each in its very immutability.[972] Thus, it saw the Real created in belief as an immutable identity among the immutable identities, and with itself showed it mercy through existentiation. This is why we say that the Real created in belief is the first thing shown mercy after its showing mercy through itself in the existentiation of the receivers of mercy.[973]

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[970] Everything in creation is a manifestation of an immutable identity or more fundamentally a Divine Name. It is the immutable identity which makes an existent all that it is, but this identity does not exist in the sense of external existence. It abides in its state of immutable non-manifestation. It is according to the relationship of manifester-manifestation that Ibn al-'Arabi says that effects belong only to non-existents, i.e. immutable identities or Divine Names. But he also acknowledges the reality of causation between things in the world, although this 'horizontal' causation too is a manifestation of properties determined by the immutable identities.

[971] It is unclear exactly what is meant here, and our commentators do not agree. From what I can gather, the question of how non-manifested things effect manifested ones requires a certain power of imagination to be understood properly.

[972] This is the mercy of free-giving (*rahmat al-imtinan*) spoken of in the Ringstone of Solomon.

[973] The Real created in belief (*al-Haqq al-makhluq fi'l-i'tiqadat*) refers to the "god of beliefs" as discussed in the Ringstone of Shu'ayb and elsewhere. The concepts and images in the imagination of a person which go to make up his own personal "god of beliefs" are "created" insofar as they are forms in his soul. As a created entity, the god of beliefs must also have a principle in the realm of immutability, for they are part of the immutable identity of the person who has 'created' this god in his imagination. The existence of this qualified god of beliefs thus depends on the existence of the receiver of mercy, i.e. the created individual. The 'god of beliefs' or the 'imagined Real' is created *after* the creation of the person since these are forms that reside in a soul (and recall that to be shown

It also has another effect, one based on request.[974] Veiled persons ask the Real to show them mercy in their belief, while the Folk of Unveiling ask God's Mercy to reside in them. They ask with the Name *Allah*, saying, "O *Allah*, have Mercy upon us."[975] Nothing shows them Mercy save Mercy's residing in them. It owns the determination, for indeed in reality the determination belongs to the meaning$_m$ residing in a locus. In reality, *it* is what is merciful. God, who is solicitous to his slaves, is merciful to them only through Mercy. When it resides in them they taste its determination.[976] Whosoever is remembered by Mercy is merciful, though the agent is named "merciful" or "giver of mercy".[977] Determination does not possess the quality of being created, for it is something necessitated by meanings$_m$ in themselves.[978] States are neither existent nor non-existent, which is to say that they have no identity in existence[979] because they are attributions, but neither are they non-existent in terms of determination, because that within which knowledge resides is called a knower and this is the state. The knower is an essence described as possessing knowledge. It[980] is neither that very essence nor that very knowledge: there is nothing more than knowledge in an essence wherein there resides this knowledge. Its being a knower[981] is a state of this essence by virtue of its having taken on that meaning$_m$ as quality. The attribution of knowledge to it comes to be, and so it is referred to as 'knower'. In reality, mercy is an attribution of that which is

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mercy here means none other than to be given being). More fundamentally, however, the creation of the god of beliefs can be seen as part of the unfolding of that person's very own creation, which does not negate its coming "after".

[974] Recall that there are different types of request as discussed in the Ringstone of Seth: requests through preparedness, through states, and through words. This is the mercy of obligation (*rahmat al-wujub*) which is the mercy that flows within creation according to the needs of things. See the Ringstone of Solomon.

[975] The use of the Supreme Name *Allah* is meant to show that the true man of unveiling does not qualify his request as determined by his own desires. He seeks, not merely a particular mercy, but Mercy as such. He knows what Mercy is and asks accordingly.

[976] The "it" in the previous four sentences refers to Mercy, to which the determination (*hukm*) belongs. Mercy determines its recipient to be merciful, and so the recipient is governed by this determination. Mercy itself is what is merciful insofar as *it* is what determines the locus in which it resides to be merciful.

[977] That is to say, although one can refer to a particular being as merciful, in reality is it Mercy acting through him.

[978] Determination (*hukm*) is not existent in the sense that the immutable identity or Divine Quality, which makes a thing possess the qualities it does, has no concrete existence. This was discussed extensively in the Ringstone of Adam. It *does* exist, however, insofar as its effects are manifested in the external realm.

[979] Alternately one could say, "They have no concrete existence." A state is neither a concrete entity, because it belongs to a concrete entity, nor is it non-manifested, because it does appear in the realm of manifestation.

[980] That is, the state

[981] That is, this essence's being a knower.

merciful.[982] *It*[983] necessitates the determination, and it is the giver of mercy. He who existentiated it[984] in the object of mercy did not existentiate it in order that He show mercy to the latter; He only existentiated the former so that he in whom it resides would be merciful. He, glorified be He, is not a locus for becoming,[985] and is not a locus in which mercy can be existentiated in His giving mercy.[986] Any giver of mercy can only be so by mercy residing in him. It is established that He is identical with Mercy.[987]

There are those who have no taste in this, nor have they set foot in it. They venture to say that He is identical with Mercy, or identical with a Quality, and they also say that He is not identical with that Quality nor with any other. In their view the Real's Qualities are neither He nor other than Him, because they are not able to deny them, nor are they able to make them identical with Him.[988] They thus assume this manner of speaking, which is a good thing. However, something else would have been more true to this affair and more exalted in its form: namely, to deny that the identities of the Qualities have an existence residing in the essence that is said to possess them. They are only attributions and relations between that which possesses them as quality and their intelligible identities.[989]

Even though Mercy is all-encompassing,[990] it is differentiated in relation to each Divine Name. It is because of this that He is asked to show Mercy through every Divine Name, glorified be He. God's Mercy and the allusion[991] are what encompass everything. Moreover it[992] has many ramifications, which are as numerous as the Divine Names. It is not universal in relation to that specific Divine Name in the petitioner's saying, "My Lord, grant me Mercy," and the same is true for

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[982] "Attribution" here translates *nisbah*, which in other contexts is rendered as "relationship" or "relation". It is the same word used to describe the status of the Divine Names in relation to the Divine Essence.
[983] Again, mercy.
[984] That is, mercy.
[985] *Hawadith*, or entities which come to be.
[986] In other words, it is not the case that as Giver of Mercy mercy is existentiated in Him.
[987] Mercy is an intrinsic aspect of the Self, and hence is one. All mercy is God's Mercy, and so all possible mercies are none other than the one reality of Mercy. No particular instance of mercy can escape being God's Mercy, and yet God's Mercy must be one lest multiplicity be introduced into the Supreme Self. Thus, even though mercy comes to be and passes out of being from the perspective of the world, this does not make God subject to the constraints of becoming.
[988] Again, Ibn al-'Arabi is here criticizing the views of some of the theologians.
[989] The Qualities are attributions or relationships between the object said to possess the Quality on the one hand, and the distinguishing realities that make up the very what-it-is (or identity) of the Quality on the other. The identities spoken of here refer to the unique reality by which one Quality is set apart from another, an issue discussed by Ibn al-'Arabi later in this paragraph. This is a restatement of the truth expressed in the Ringstone of Adam, namely that a thing can be non-existent concretely yet exist as determination in the realm of manifestation.
[990] *Jami'*, meaning "comprehensive" or "that which gathers together".
[991] The allusion is what is indicated by '*My* Mercy' in the Divine Saying concerning Mercy's encompassment of all things, namely the Divine Essence.
[992] That is, Divine Mercy.

the other Names, even in the case of the Avenger when one says, "O Avenger, grant me Mercy." This is so because these Names, by their realities, indicate the named Essence according to differentiated meanings. One calls by them for the sake of Mercy, and with respect to their indicating none other than the Essence named by that Name. One does not do so with respect to what it is granted by that which this Name indicates, which is that by which it is separated and distinguished from what is other than itself. But it is also not distinguished from what is other than itself, and, so far as he[993] is concerned, it indicates the Essence. What distinguishes it in itself is its essence, since no matter what terminology one chooses there is a reality which, in its essence, is distinguished from what is other than itself, even though all are used to indicate a single named Identity. There is no disagreement as to each Name's having a determination not possessed by another, and this should be taken into account, just as one takes into account the fact of their indicating the named Essence. This is why Abu al-Qasim ibn al-Qasi[994] said of the Divine Names, "Indeed each Divine Name, standing alone, is named by the totality of the Divine Names, all of them." When you offer it in remembrance, you qualify it with all the Names, and this is because they indicate a single Identity, even if the Names are multiple, and their realities variegated—that is, the realities of these Names.[995]

Mercy is obtained in two ways. There is the way of obligation, spoken of in His Words, *We shall write it for those who are wary and offer alms*,[996] and who offer the qualities of knowledge and works which He has enjoined upon them.[997] The other way by which Mercy is obtained is the way of Divine free-giving, which is not reached through action, spoken of in His Words, *And My Mercy encompasseth everything*.[998] Of this it is also said, *That God may forgive thy sins which came before and those that come after*.[999] There are also His Words, "Do as thou wilt; I have forgiven thee."[1000] Know this.

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[993] That is, the petitioner.
[994] Cf. chapter on Enoch
[995] When one petitions by one of the Divine Names, in accordance with the verse, *God has the Most Beautiful Names, so call by them* (7:180), one is seeking the Divine Mercy through one of its aspects. It is only because God is Lord (*al-Rabb*) or God is the Avenger (*al-Muntaqim*) that one calls upon the Lord or the Avenger. The distinguishing essence (*dhat*, in the sense of what-it-is) of each Name is not what is sought after, for the Names have no reality save in their Naming the one Supreme Named. It is thus that the names are both distinguished and indistinguishable. It must be remembered that anything one seeks is a mercy, for it is Mercy that gives reality to all things. It is for the sake of Mercy, or some manifestation of Mercy, that one uses a particular Divine Name. Each Name is like a gate for Mercy to pass through. Ibn al-'Arabi is saying here that one looks to the gate for the sake of what will come through it, not for the sake of what distinguishes that gate from other gates.
[996] 7:156
[997] That is, the mercy of obligation is obtained through doing what is good.
[998] 7:156
[999] 48:2, where God is speaking to the Prophet specifically.
[1000] Muslim, 49:29. This is from a Divine Saying where the slave sins over and over again and each time asks forgiveness of God, who forgives him each time for repenting and acknowledging that he has a Lord who forgives sin.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Intimacy in the Word of Elias

Elias was Idris, and was a prophet before Noah. God raised him to a high place.[1001] He dwells in the heart of the spheres, the sphere of the sun.[1002] He was sent to the city of Baalbek. Baal is the name of an idol, and Bek was the ruler of that city. This idol named Baal was specific to the king.

There appeared unto Elias a mountain named Lubnan—from *al-lubanah*, meaning "need"—rent asunder to reveal a horse of fire, and all its trappings were of fire. When he saw it he mounted it, and all his desires fell away, and he became an intellect without desire.[1003] Nothing remained in him to which the designs of the soul might become attached. In him the Real was made incomparable, and so he was possessed of half of the knowledge of God. As far as its reception of knowledge through its own meditations is concerned, when the intellect is stripped down to itself its knowledge of God is based on the assertion of incomparability, not the assertion of similarity. When God gives someone knowledge through self-disclosure, his knowledge of God becomes perfected. He declares Him to be incomparable in one instance and declares Him to be similar in another, and he sees the Real flowing in the forms of nature and those of the elements. For him there remains no form which he does not see as being identical with the Real. This is perfect knowledge, which the descended Laws relate to us from God.

All imagination$_w$[1004] judges based on this knowledge. Because of this,

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[1001] *And mention in the Book Idris; he was a true man, a Prophet. We raised him to a high place*. (19:57)

[1002] See Ringstone of Noah concerning the celestial spheres.

[1003] The commentators tell us that the mountain symbolizes the body, which the soul needs (*lubanah*=need) in order to journey through the world to its perfection. Its rending asunder represents the soul's act of breaking free of its constraints, and the horse represents the animal soul which is the mount of the human soul. The fiery nature of the horse and its trappings symbolizes the proximity of the Spirit and its light, and hearkens to the burning tree of Moses.

[1004] The difficulty in Ibn al-'Arabi's use of *wahm* is that it is an extremely important term in Islamic philosophy where it is well-defined, but it is not always clear how Ibn al-'Arabi himself chooses to use it. Sometimes it is purely and simply meant to convey something conjectured or supposed, or something imaginary. In philosophy, the technical term *wahm* has both an active aspect and a receptive aspect. Its receptive aspect is that of perceiving meanings within forms, while its active aspect is that of deeming a certain reality to be within a form without actually having a direct perception of it. An example of the former is the hostility a sheep perceives in the form of the wolf. An example of the latter is the supposition that something is sweet because it is golden and viscous (like honey) though yet untasted. It is in this latter sense that *wahm* can mean conjecture or supposition, or imaginary (only subjectively real) as opposed to imaginational (which can be both subjectively and objectively real). It is in this latter function, moreover, that *wahm* can be mistaken and engender errors, unlike the former function which is the perception of a formless essence (meaning, *ma'na*) that is objectively real. The concept which unites these two disparate seeming functions is the perception of a non-sensible thing (either not sensible by definition or not sensed yet) in something that *is* sensible and being sensed.

imagination$_w$, in this makeup, has greater influence than does the intellect, because the possessor of intellect, whatever he has attained in his intellect, cannot escape the determination imagination$_w$ has over it, nor can he escape putting what he intellects into form. Imagination$_w$ is the greatest authority in this perfect form of man. The descended Laws came using it,[1005] asserting similarity and asserting incomparability—asserting similarity within incomparability through imagination$_w$, and asserting incomparability within similarity through the intellect. Thus, everything is connected to everything. The assertion of similarity is not capable of escaping the assertion of incomparability, nor is the assertion of incomparability capable of escaping the assertion of similarity. He said, transcendent is He, *There is none like into His likeness*, asserting incomparability and similarity, *And He is the Hearing, the Seeing*, asserting similarity. It is the greatest of the verses to descend concerning incomparability, and even so it is not bereft of the assertion of similarity through employing "like". Now, He knows Himself better than all knowers, and He spoke of Himself only as we have mentioned. Moreover He said, *Glorified be thy Lord, the Lord of Glory, above what they attribute*, and they only describe Him through what is granted them by their intellects. He made Himself incomparable with their assertion of incomparability, since they delimited Him through that assertion of incomparability—owing to the intellect's shortcoming when it comes to perceiving the likes of this.[1006] All the Laws speak through that by which imagination$_w$ judges, for the Real is never bereft of a quality wherein He is manifest. Thus did they speak,

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The *wahm* perceives meanings in particular things, which is to say that it perceives neither pure intelligibles nor bodily forms but intelligibles enmattered in bodily forms. The *wahm* is the bridge, as it were, between incomparability and similarity, because its domain is the presence of intelligibles (which are originally unmattered) *in* corporeal or imaginational bodies (which are by definition material). While man is in this makeup his perceptions always involve some sort of form, and hence his perception or intellection of intelligibles in the context of this world will stand in need of the *wahm*. The *wahm* perceives meanings in particular things, which is to say that it perceives neither pure intelligibles nor bodily forms but intelligibles enmattered in bodily forms. The *wahm* is the bridge, as it were, between incomparability and similarity, because its domain is the presence of intelligibles (which are originally unmattered) in corporeal or imaginational bodies (which are by definition material). While man is in this makeup his perceptions always involve some sort of form, and hence his perception or intellection of intelligibles in the context of this world will stand in need of the *wahm*.

It is not reasonable to assume that Ibn al-'Arabi's general acquaintance with the Islamic intellectual circles could have left him ignorant of what wahm meant to the philosophers. In fact, when he speaks of the 'authority' of *wahm* in the soul he is in fact using language very similar to that of someone such as Ibn Sina, who referred to the *wahm* as the most controlling aspect of animals (including man). It is so controlling and authoritative because man is almost always dealing with particular things, which is the domain of the *wahm*, and not with universals, which is the realm of the intellect. For this translator it is very difficult to discern if or when Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to evoke the philosophical use of *wahm*, which has been sometimes rendered as "apprehension" or "estimation", or is simply using it to convey the meaning of 'conjecture' or 'imaginary'. Thus, for the sake of consistency and clarity, *wahm* is always translated as imagination$_w$ with the subscript, as opposed to imagination without the subscript with translates *khayal* and its derivations.

[1005] That is, speaking a language comprehensible to the *wahm*.

[1006] This subject is discussed in the Ringstone of Noah.

and this is what they related.

The communities acted upon this,[1007] and the Real granted them self-disclosure, and as inheritors they become attached to the Messengers, saying what the messengers said. *God knoweth best where He placeth His Message*. *God knoweth best* [1008] can be seen from various points of view. From one point of view the messengers are the predicate, and from another point of view *knoweth best* is the subject of *where He placeth His Message*. There is reality in both points of view, and for that reason we speak of similarity within incomparability and incomparability within similarity.

After having established this we take down the coverings and lower the veils from the eye of the critical thinker and the believer, even though both are from amongst the forms wherein the Real self-discloses. But we have been commanded to veil,[1009] in order for the ranking in excellence of the forms' preparedness to be manifest, and so that there will manifest the truth that the self-discloser in the form is determined by the preparedness of the form.[1010] That which is granted by its reality as well as by its entailments is attributed to Him, and this must be so.[1011] It is as one who sees the Real during sleep and does not deny it, and has no doubts that it is the Real Himself; the entailments and realities of that form, wherein He disclosed Himself during that sleep, follow upon it. Then he interprets it—which means 'to traverse'—as being another thing required by the intellect's assertion of incomparability. If the interpreter is a man of unveiling and faith, he does not only 'traverse' in order to reach incomparability; rather, he gives it[1012] its full due, both in terms of the assertion of incomparability and in terms of that wherein it was manifest.[1013] In reality, "God" is an allusion for one who understands what is being

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[1007] That is, upon the knowledge of incomparability and similarity.

[1008] The context of this verse (6:124) is the following. *When there came to them a sign, they said, 'We will not believe until there comes unto us the likes of that which has come unto the Messengers of God.' God knoweth best where He placeth His Message*. The distinction being made here is between reading the verse as above or as, "We will not believe until there comes unto us the like of that which has come. The Messengers of God are God. [He] knoweth best where He placeth His Message." This second reading of Ibn al'Arabi's is meant to show that the Messengers are loci of manifestation for God.

[1009] That is, to reveal knowledge to people in accordance with their capacity to understand.

[1010] The "critical thinker" (*muntaqid*) examines things through thought, while the believer in a creed (*mu'taqid*) holds to that creed. Neither attain to the truest kind of knowledge, but both nevertheless occupy their place in the hierarchy of things, each according to his own preparedness.

[1011] The "its" refers to the preparedness of the form mentioned in the previous sentence, which is none other than the immutable identity. The entailments (*lawazim*) of the immutable identity are also attributed to God, who emanates both the substance and accidents of the identity.

[1012] That is, the form

[1013] The intelligence will always want to find a way to interpret a vision of God in order to make God completely unlike the essence of that form. To give that form its full due, however, is to "traverse" from that form but also to acknowledge the form at its own level. This acknowledgement is the assertion of similarity, for it considers that form to be a form of God.

pointed to.[1014]

The spirit and ringstone of this Wisdom is that things are divided into that which affects and that which is affected. We thus have two terms. That which affects, from every point of view, in every state and in every presence, is God. That which is affected, from every point of view, in every state, and in every presence, is the world. When something is encountered,[1015] attach all things to the principle that they correspond to, for what is encountered is necessarily a branch of a principle, as the Divine Love is in relation to the slave's supererogatory works. This is the effect between that which affects and that which is affected.[1016] Remember that the Real is the slave's hearing, his seeing, and his other faculties by reason of this Love. This effect is well-established, and one cannot deny it, due to its being affirmed in the Law in the sight of a believer.[1017]

Now, a sound intellect is either a person of a divine unveiling in a natural locus of self-disclosure, knowing what we have said, or he is a submitting believer, believing in it as narrated in the authentic tradition.[1018] It must be that imagination$_w$'s influence controls the possessor of intellect who inquires into what the Real brought through this form, for he is a believer in it. As for the one who is not a believer, he judges imagination$_w$ by imagination$_w$. By his mental reasoning he imagines that the self-disclosure God granted him in the dream is impossible for Him. But the imagination$_w$ therein, from whence he knows not due to his being heedless of his soul, does not withdraw from him.[1019]

[1014] This refers back to Ibn al-'Arabi's discussion of the aforementioned verse, *God knoweth best where He placeth His Message.* The word *Allah* refers to the reality of which the Messengers are manifestations.

[1015] A *warid* is something that one encounters or something that arrives to one, and in Islamic metaphysics it usually refers to inward visions and inspirations. I believe here *warid* has the general sense of anything that comes to our attention.

[1016] All things have an origin or root (*asl*) from which they stem. All perfections, such as knowledge, being, and power, should be attributed to God. All lacks and imperfections, such as needfulness and contingency, should be attributed to the world. The relationship of God to the world should always be maintained in everything we experience, and which is spoken of here in terms of that which affects (*mu'aththir*) and that which is affected (*mu'aththar*). That God should love a person as a result of his supererogatory worship is an effect of that worship from one point of view, but in reality the acts of the person are an expression of the Divine Selfhood and so from the Divine point of view the relationship of affecting/affected is maintained.

[1017] That is to say, even the believer must acknowledge this because it is mentioned explicitly in the Divine Saying.

[1018] That is to say, a person whose intellect (*'aql*) is not distorted and completely veiled will either see the truths expounded above through direct unveiling or as a person who believes in what the religion teaches and has submitted himself to it.

[1019] The dreamer has a vision of a form, and he perceives that it is God in this form. This is the perceptive aspect of the imagination$_w$. But then the active aspect of his imagination$_w$, the one which is susceptible to error and which is influenced by a person's intelligence and experience, makes a judgment about the form that it could not be God. His reasoning and thinking do not allow this possibility to exist, just as a person in whose experience all golden and viscous material was bitter would never deem such a substance to be sweet before tasting it. Judging that he has escaped from the influence of the imagination$_w$, he has in reality done nothing more than allow imagination$_w$ to lead him

Regarding this[1020] there are His Words, *Call upon Me, I shall answer you*.[1021] And He said, transcendent is He, *When My slaves ask thee of Me, indeed I am near, and I answer the call of the caller when he calleth upon Me*,[1022] since He does not answer unless there is one who calls upon Him. Though the caller is identical with the Answerer, there is no contention over the difference of forms, for there are no doubt two forms.[1023] All of these forms are like Zayd's bodily parts: it is known that Zayd is a single, individual reality, and that his head is not the form of his foot, his head, his eye, or his eyebrow. He is many and one: many in form, one in identity. It is the same in man, who is without doubt one in identity. But we do not doubt that 'Amr is neither Zayd, nor Khaled, nor Ja'far, and that the individuals of this single identity are infinite within existence. Even though it is one in identity, it is many through forms and individuals.[1024] You know absolutely, if you are a believer, that the Real discloses Himself on the Day of Resurrection in a form that is known, then transmutes Himself into another form and is denied, then transmutes Himself from that into a form and is known.[1025] It is He who discloses Himself—He and no other—in each form. And it is known that one form is not some other form. It is as though the one Identity is a mirror. When the onlooker looks upon the form of his belief in God, he recognizes it and acknowledges it. If it happens that he sees therein the belief of another he will deny it, just as in a mirror he will see his own form and that of another. The mirror is a single identity and the multiple forms are within the eye of the seer. There is no form in the mirror at all,[1026] although from one point of view the mirror has an effect on these forms and from another point of view it does not. The effect it has is that it reflects the form with a changed shape, whether it be smaller, larger, longer, or wider. It has an effect on the dimensions, which depend on it. These changes are due only to the differing dimensions of the mirrors. Contemplate the similitude of a single mirror amongst these mirrors; contemplate not the assembly. This is your contemplation of Him as Essence. He is Beyond Need of the worlds. With respect to the Divine Names He is, at that moment, like many mirrors. The reality of any Divine Name in which you contemplate yourself or whoever contemplates will manifest to him who contemplates.[1027] The affair is thus,

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into another error. His intellect is not "sound" for it is not independent but is mixed with the error-prone aspect of the imagination$_w$. In its truest state, the intellect is free from the influence of any judgment based on forms, and hence free of the influence of the imagination$_w$.

[1020] That is, regarding the question of that which affects and that which is affected.

[1021] 40:60

[1022] 2:186

[1023] That is, the form of the caller and form of the called upon.

[1024] This is similar to the discussion in the Ringstone of Jacob regarding multiplicity in the reality of humanity, p.***.

[1025] Muslim 1:299, quoted in the Ringstone of Shu'ayb.

[1026] That is to say, on its own the mirror does not grant these forms.

[1027] Here "contemplate" can also mean "see" (*nazara*). When one contemplates or sees many forms in a single mirror, this is the similitude of seeing the multiplicity of the world's forms in the Divine

if you understand.

Do not worry, and do not fear, for God loves courage, even if it is in the killing of a snake.[1028] Now, the snake is none other than yourself. The snake is a snake in itself, in form and reality. A thing cannot be killed such as to cease being itself. Even if a form is corruptible in the sensory domain, its definition preserves it, and imagination does not allow it to disappear. Now, the affair is thus, and this is the essences' security, grandeur, and defense. You cannot destroy these definitions. What grandeur is greater than this grandeur? You imagine, based on your imagination$_w$, that you have killed, but through intellect and imagination$_w$ the form continues to exist in its definition. The proof of this is, *It was not thyself that threw, but God threw*.[1029] The eye perceived nothing other than the Muhammadan form, for which the act of throwing was affirmed in the sensory domain, and from which this act was firstly denied, then secondly affirmed. It was then finally amended to be God's throwing in the Muhammadan form.[1030] The Real Himself informed His slaves of this. No one said it for Him; indeed, He said it for Himself. His giving of news is truthful, and it is obligatory to believe in it, whether you have grasped knowledge of what He has said or not; one is either a knower or a believing Muslim.

Among those things which will show you the weakness of intellectual reasoning is that the intellect judges that a cause cannot be caused by that of which it is a cause. This is the judgement of the intellect, there being nothing hidden in this. Now, there is nothing in the science of self-disclosure but this: that the cause is caused by that of which it is a cause. The judgment of the intellect is sound when one is on his guard in what he thinks. The utmost one can say, having seen the affair as being different than what would be granted by mental proofs, is the following: that this one identity, after it having been established that it is one in this multiplicity, cannot, insofar as it is a cause—in a form amongst these forms—of something that is caused, be caused by that which it causes in its state of being a cause.[1031] This is the

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Mirror, the Supreme Self. In contemplating or seeing oneself or another in one out of a multitude of mirrors one has the similitude of seeing oneself through the prism of the infinite divine presences, as spoken of in the Ringstone of Seth. When you see yourself in a particular mirror as opposed to another, the reality or what-it-is of that mirror will manifest itself to you, because it will lend the reflected form its (i.e. the mirror's) character. This is what Ibn al-'Arabi means in speaking of the changed shape of the form as determined by the shape of the mirror.

[1028] A reference to a tradition I have not been able to trace.

[1029] 8:17

[1030] That is, *Thou threwest not*, is the denial, followed by, *...when thou threwest...* which is the affirmation. Nothing dies in the sense of being utterly destroyed, because there is always a way in which it is preserved. No matter how many snakes one kills, the archetypal reality of snakes abides at its own level. A thing can disappear from the sensory domain and continue existing at the level of the imaginational world, such as the soul at death. The "definitions" spoken of here refer to the form or what-it-is of things, which abide forever in the knowledge of God. The "proof" in the aforementioned verse is that at root it is God who kills and preserves all things, and though He should destroy a thing in the sensory world it abides for Him eternally.

[1031] In the Ringstone of Ezra Ibn al-'Arabi discussed the relationship of determiner and determined, and the way in which the determined determines the determiner. A similar point is being made here. The

utmost one can say if he has seen the affair *as it is*, and has not stopped at his mental reasoning. Now, if this is the case for the question of causation, then what are your thoughts concerning mental reasoning's encompassing something beyond this narrow pass? None are more intelligent than the messengers, the blessings of God be upon them, and they said what they said in their narrations from the Divine. They affirmed what was affirmed by the intellect and added what the intellect cannot independently perceive, as well as what the intellect considers absurd at first but acknowledges in self-disclosure. When it is alone with itself after the self-disclosure it is bewildered by what it sees. If one is the slave of the Lord, the intellect will defer to Him, but if he is a slave of speculation, the truth will defer to its judgment.[1032]

This is only so as long as one is in the lower-worldly makeup, veiled from one's latter-wordly makeup in this lower world.[1033] The knowers appear here as though they are in the form of the lower-world, as they are subject to its determinations.[1034] God most high has transformed them inwardly into the latter-worldly makeup, and this must needs be so. In form they are unknown except to those whose discernment has been unveiled by God, and who thus can perceive. None of those who know God by virtue of Divine self-disclosure lack the makeup of the Hereafter. They have been assembled in this, their lower world, and they have been resurrected from their grave.[1035] They see what others do not see, and witness what others do not witness. This is God's solicitude for some of His slaves.

Whosoever wishes to discover this Wisdom of Elias and Idris—to whom God gave two makeups, as a prophet before Noah, then raised and descended as a messenger after that, God having brought these two stations[1036] together for him—let

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caused causes the cause to be a cause in the sense that without that which it causes a cause cannot be a cause. In the cause there is something that entails the caused thing, which means that the cause needs the caused thing in order to be what it is *qua* cause. The relationship of cause and caused is reciprocal from one point of view, for insofar as the cause needs the caused it can be said that the caused is a cause of the cause. What Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to establish is a vision of causation that considers the caused entity to be a vital part of the cause, a part of which the cause can never be wholly independent. However, he is clear that a caused thing cannot cause its cause in precisely the same way that the cause causes *it*. The reciprocity does not reverse the relationship or seek to overturn the essence of causation. Rather, it is meant to show the special interconnectedness of a cause and that which it causes.

[1032] That is, the judgment of the intellect. This continues the theme of the function of the intelligence versus the direct vision of divine reality. When the two are in harmony the intellect/intelligence will resign itself to its own great but not unlimited role. The true slave submits his intelligence to the divine self-disclosure when it comes, but he who relies solely on his concepts will overturn the truth in favor of his thinking.

[1033] That is, it is in this world that men can deny God's self-disclosure through the errors of their intelligence. After death, they will have no choice but to accept what they see, for the veils will have come down.

[1034] The most exalted souls in this world are still subject to its pains and torments, and ultimately bodily death, but are inwardly dead and reborn while they walk among ordinary people.

[1035] The assembly (*hashr*) and resurrection (*nashr*) which all souls will experience on the Day of Judgment is experienced inwardly by the realized few while they live in this world.

[1036] That is, of prophethood and messengerhood.

him descend from the determinations of his intellect to his desires and be an animal in an absolute manner, so that there may be unveiled to him what has been unveiled for every creature except the *two endowed with weight*.[1037] He will then know that he has realized his animality. The signs of this are two. The first is this unveiling: to see who is chastised in his grave and who is given delight, to see the dead as being alive, the silent as speaking, the sitting as walking.[1038] The second sign is muteness, such that when one desires to speak of something he sees, he is unable; it is then that one realizes his animality. We had a pupil who had attained this unveiling, except that muteness did not preserve him, and so he did not realize his animality. When God caused me to occupy this station I acheived a total realization of my animality. I would see, desiring to speak of what I was witnessing without being able. I would make no distinction between myself and the mutes who could not speak.[1039]

When one realizes this that we have spoken of, he is conveyed to being a pure intellect outside of natural matter, witnessing those things that are the principles of what is manifest in the forms of nature. Thus, through a knowledge by taste, he knows from whence is manifest a determination in the forms of nature.[1040] If it is unveiled to one that nature is identical with the Breath of the All-Merciful, then *he has been given much good*.[1041] If he is content with what we have spoken of then this measure of the knowledge governing his intellect will suffice him; he thus enters among the knowers, and through taste knows that *You did not slay them, but God slew them*—naught killed them but the iron and the striker who took the place of these forms—and that in the end the killing and the throwing did take place.[1042] He

[1037] *Thaqalan*, that is, jinn and men. See Qur'an 55:31.

[1038] That is, such a one sees the afterlife of he who has passed and also perceives the inward activity of the soul of someone who is outwardly still, i.e. he perceives the *barzakh*.

[1039] The ability to speak of something one sees implies the ability of ideas to grasp it. This station of "animality" is the state where a man perceives what he perceives but is unable to speak of it because the utter inability of ideas to contain it. Such a person, Ibn al-'Arabi implies, will be hindered by none of the limitations and constraints associated with the intellect (recall that *'aql* comes from the verb "to bind"). It is significant that Ibn al-'Arabi desired to speak but was not able, unlike his student. His student had not gone beyond the bounds set by his intelligence, and his lack of muteness was an indication that he had not realized his "animality". Ibn al-'Arabi, on the other hand, achieved a degree of vision at which limited human thought fails, and hence speech. It is worth remembering that Ibn al-'Arabi is speaking of realities of the *barzakh*, a domain of imponderables beyond our ability to conceive. It is not strange that words should fail when one encounters something wholly new and unlike everything in this world, such as the state of those who have died and reside in the realm of the afterlife.

[1040] It is not clear to me from the commentaries what the nature of this movement from animality to pure (*mujarrad*, completely uncoupled from matter) intellect precisely is. It may be a kind of *fana'* ("perishing") of the intelligence in the realities of the *barzakh*, after which the intelligence returns to abide (*baqa'*) at a new degree of understanding which incorporates the experience of the intermediate world one attained during the station of "animality". Then his intellect is able to see things and to see their principles in them.

[1041] 2:269

[1042] That is, he understands how it is that God is the sole Agent while at the same time not denying the reality of the forms in the world.

will also then witness things in their principles and forms, and will become complete. If he witnesses the Breath then with this completeness there will be perfection.[1043] He will see nothing without seeing God as being identical with what he sees. He will see the seer as being identical with the seen. This much suffices.

And God giveth grace, and is the Guide.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Excellence in the Word of Luqman

When the Divinity wills to wish bounty
For Himself, all being is food
And when the Divinity wills to wish bounty
For us, He is the food as He wills[1044]
His Will is His Wish so speak of it so
He has willed it, and so it is willed
He wishes increase and wishes decrease
What He wills is naught but what is willed
This is the difference between them, so realize this
And in one respect they are the same[1045]

God most high said, *We gave Luqman Wisdom*,[1046] and, *Whoso is given Wisdom is given much good.*[1047] Thus Luqman, as referred to explicitly, was possessed of much good, as attested by God. Now, wisdom can be articulated or can be left in silence. Take for example Luqman's words to his son, *O my son, if it should be but the weight of one grain of mustard-seed, and though it be in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, God shall bring it forth*.[1048] This is articulated wisdom, which consists in

[1043] It seems there are two degrees of realization spoken of here. The first is that one sees the principles of manifested things as mentioned in the first sentence of the paragraph. Then one can move to a higher station where one witnesses the Breath of the All-Merciful. I believe that the phrase, "If he is content with what we have spoken of…" refers to the station before the unveiling of the Breath of the All-Merciful.

[1044] That is, as a locus of manifestation for the Divine Names and Qualities, the world "feeds" God by providing that in whose absence the Names could not be fully what they are. God feeds existence by providing it with all of its reality.

[1045] In this poem "Will" translates *mashiyyah* and "Wish" *iradah*, although both could be and have been translated as "Will"; I have chosen different words for the sake of translation. It is not clear what each one is meant to refer to. One way of considering them is to say that the Will (*mashiyyah*) is that which brings all things into existence and which would correspond to the command of bringing into being (*al-amr al-takwini*). (It is the *mashiyyah* that is mentioned in the first sentence of Adam, "The Real willed…") Then the "Wish" (*iradah*) would be the Will of God within creation, corresponding to the command by intermediation (*al-amr bi'l-wasitah*). Then the increase and decrease would refer to God's Will operating within creation. Finally, since both the Will and the Wish are Qualities of God, they are not separate at all, but attributions of the Supreme Self.

[1046] 31:12

[1047] 2:269

[1048] 31:16

making God the one who brings it forth. God affirmed this in His Book, and these words cannot be turned back on the one who spoke them. As for the wisdom left in silence and known through context, it is to speak not of the recipient of this grain. He did not speak of it, nor did he say, "God shall bring it forth to thee or another besides thee." He employed the words "bringing forth" in a general manner, and made the recipient of what was brought forth to be in the heavens or in the earth, whichever it happened to be, reminding one to contemplate His Words, *And He is God in the heavens and in the earth*.[1049] Through what he articulated and through what he left in silence, Luqman called attention to the fact that the Real is identical with everything known. 'What is known' is more general than 'thing', for He is the most unknowable of unknowables.[1050]

Then he completed the Wisdom and gave its full due so that the makeup[1051] be perfect in it, saying, *Indeed God is Subtle*.[1052] Part of His subtlety and benevolence is that He should be identical with a thing referred to as such and such and defined as such and such, where one only speaks of it by virtue of what its name indicates through agreement and conventional usage. Thus it is said that such and such is 'heaven', 'earth', 'rock', 'tree', 'animal', 'angel', 'bounty', or 'food'; from and in everything the identity is one. It resembles what the Ash'arites say regarding the world's being homologous in substance, being a single substance. This is the same as our saying that the identity is one. Then they say that it is variegated through accidents, and this is the same as our saying that it is variegated and multiple through forms and relationships such that distinction arises. It is thus said that *this* is not *that* by virtue of its form, or its accident, or its temperament—say whatever you wish. *This* is identical with *that* by virtue of its substance. Because of this, the substance itself is considered in every definition of form and temperament. We say that it is none other than the Real. The theologian thinks that the bearer of the name 'substance', even if it is real, is not identical with the Real known by the Folk of unveiling and self-disclosure. This is the Wisdom of His being Subtle.[1053]

Then He describes Himself as being *Informed*, that is, knowing as a result of a test, which is spoken of in His Words, *And We shall assuredly try you until we know*.[1054] This is knowledge by taste. God made Himself, although He knows the affair *as it is*, to be as one who acquires knowledge. We cannot deny that to which the Real has made explicit reference concerning Himself. The Real distinguished

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[1049] 6:3

[1050] The end of this paragraph implies that knowable things (*ma'lum*) are both outwardly manifest and inwardly hidden. The word for unknowable is *nakirah*, which also refers to the indefinite noun in grammar. Here it is implied that "thing" (*shay'*) refers to that which is existent as opposed to non-manifested.

[1051] That is, the makeup of Luqman.

[1052] 31:16

[1053] This subject of the unity of substance was discussed in the Ringstone of Shu'ayb, p.***.

[1054] 47:31

between knowledge by taste and absolute knowledge. Knowledge by taste is qualified by the faculties.[1055] Speaking of Himself, He says that He is identical with the faculties of his slave, in His Words, "I will be his hearing," which is one of the faculties of the slave, "his sight," which is one of the faculties of the slave, "his tongue," which is one of the bodily parts of the slave, "his foot…and his hand." He did not stop short with only the faculties, but even mentioned the bodily parts. The slave is none other than these bodily parts and faculties. That which is called slave is identical with the Real, but the slave is not identical with the Master,[1056] because the attributions are distinguishable in their essences. The Object of these attributions does not undergo distinction, for there is naught but His Identity in all the attributions. It is a single Identity that possesses attributions, relations, and qualities.

Part of the completeness of this Wisdom of Luqman, in teaching his son, is the use of the two Divine Names by which God most high is named: *Subtle, Informed*. Had he used them with respect to 'to be'—which is Being—and said 'is', it would have been a more complete and superior wisdom.[1057] God narrated the meaning of the words of Luqman spoke. He added nothing to them—even though his words *Indeed God is Subtle, Informed* are God's Words; God knew that if Luqman were to have spoken in order to complete what he said he would have said that.

As for his words, *If it should be but the weight of one grain of mustard seed*, it refers to that for which it is food, being naught but the ant mentioned in His Words, *And whoso has done an ant's*[1058] *weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an ant's weight of evil shall see it*.[1059] This is the smallest thing that eats and the grain of a mustard seed is the smallest of foods. If there was something smaller He would have employed it, remembering that He said, *God is not ashamed to strike the similitude of a gnat, or aught beyond it*.[1060] Since He knew that there are things smaller than a gnat, He said, *or aught beyond it*, that is, in smallness. These are God's Words, and those in *The Earthquake* are God's Words as well, so know this.

[1055] That is, God knows in an absolute way and in a qualified way. The knowledge by taste is the knowledge God has by virtue of being identical with the faculties of the slave. God knows all things in eternity, but because each and every act of knowledge is none other than God's Knowledge, the one reality of Knowledge comprises both the absolute and the conditioned.

[1056] The Master (*sayyid*) is another way of saying Lord (*al-Rabb*) in this context, meaning that to say slave is to say master or lord. The Self is identical with all things, but at the level of duality things are not identical with each other.

[1057] The verb *kana* is most often the past tense of *yakun* ("is") and is often used in the Quran when describing God. However, in such cases it is not the past tense pure and simple, because this tense can also refer to something which is eternally true, and thus also be properly translated into English as "is". There are many instances in the Quran where *kana* appears before qualities of God, which never mean that God possessed a quality in the past but possesses it no longer. Arabic does not ordinarily use a copula, so the use of *kana* does not introduce any confusion as to the meaning.

[1058] *Dharrah*, which can mean the grub of an ant. It can also mean the dust that is only seen when sunlight strikes it directly.

[1059] 99:7-8

[1060] 2:26, *The Earthquake*

We know that God is not to be restricted by the measure of an ant, and that there are things smaller than it. He employed it for the sake of eloquence, and God knoweth best.

As for his using the diminutive for his son,[1061] it is a diminution of love. That is why he exhorted him to that which would bring him happiness if he were to carry it out. As for the wisdom of his exhortation in forbidding him from associating others with God: *To associate others with God is a mighty wrong*.[1062] That which is wronged[1063] is the station where he describes Him as being divided, while He is but a single Identity. He associates none other than Himself with Him, and this is the utmost in ignorance. The reason for this is that an individual who has no knowledge of the affair *as it is*—nor of the reality of a thing when it undergoes a diversity of forms in a single identity, and who does not know that this diversity occurs in a single identity—makes one form to be an associate of others in that station. He gives each form a part in that station. It is known that what makes one partner unique in that wherein association occurs is not identical with that other with which it is an associate, since it belongs to that other. In reality there is no partner, for each one has its own portion of that wherein there is an association. The reason for that association is a common domain. Now, if there is a common domain, the act of disposal coming from one of them will cause the common domain to disappear.[1064] *Say: Call upon God or call upon the All-Merciful.*[1065] This is the spirit of the matter.[1066]

Ringstone of the Wisdom of the Imam in the Word of Aaron

Know that the existence of Aaron, upon him be peace, came from the Presence of Mercy,[1067] according to His Words, *And we gave to him*, that is, to Moses, *his brother Aaron, of Our Mercy, as a Prophet*.[1068] His prophethood originated from the Presence of Mercy. He was greater in years than Moses, but Moses was greater than

[1061] Luqman uses the diminutive form of 'my son', *bunay*.
[1062] 31:13
[1063] I am not clear as to how the *maqam* or station (i.e. place, locus) is that which is wronged (*mazlum*). It would make sense that the person who does so wrongs himself, but the commentaries do not make it clear.
[1064] He who does not acknowledge that all forms ultimately belong to a single essence in effect gives each form a share in reality (and hence commits the cardinal sin of association or *shirk*), whereas all reality belongs to God alone. There is really no sharing or partnership of reality, because even according to such a person's conception each form has its own share which it owns and which belongs to no other. The "act of disposal" (*tasrif*) in a "common domain" relates to the argument regarding two divinities: whoever's will is carried out is the true divinity, and because the true divinity has no partner there was really no common domain to start out with, and hence no competing partner.
[1065] 17:110
[1066] That is to say, this verse shows that one calls upon the same Essence regardless of the form used to call Him. It exemplifies diversity without association.
[1067] *Rahamut*, which is derived from *rahmah* (mercy) and is similar in its form to *nasut*, *malakut*, *lahut*, etc…
[1068] 19:53

him in prophethood. Now, the prophethood of Aaron came from the Presence of Mercy, and because of this he said to his brother Moses, upon them both be peace, "*O son of my mother!"*[1069] calling him by his mother, not his father, since mercy belongs to the mother rather than the father, she being more possessed of this determination. If not for this mercy she would not have the patience to carry out the raising of a child. Then he said, "*Take me not by the beard nor by the head",* and, *"make not my enemies to gloat over me."*[1070] All of this is breath from the Breaths of the All-Merciful. This happened because he did not look carefully at the tablet he had in his hand, and which he cast from his hands.[1071] Had he looked at them carefully he would have found guidance and mercy therein. The guidance consisted in making clear the matter which had angered him, and of which Aaron was innocent. The mercy was with his brother, for even with his age and his being older than him he would not have seized the beard of any man from amongst his people. This was Aaron's solicitude for his brother, for the prophethood of Aaron came from the Mercy of God, and only the likes of this would originate from him.

Then Aaron said to Moses, upon them be peace, *"I was fearful that thou wouldst say, 'Thou hast divided the Children of Israel,'"*[1072] making me an occasion for their division. The worshippers of the calf were divided amongst themselves: there were those among them who worshipped it following the Samari, imitating him, and there were those among them who refrained from worshipping it until Moses' return so that they could question him about it. Aaron feared that this division amongst them would be attributed to him. Moses knew the matter better than did Aaron, for he knew what the companions of the calf worshipped, because he knew that God decreed that only He shall be worshipped, and God decides not a thing without its coming about. Moses reprimanded his brother for falling into denial and for his lack of scope.[1073] The knower is he who sees the Real in everything, indeed, who sees Him as identical with everything. Moses was raising Aaron by giving him knowledge, even though he was lesser in years. Because of this, when Aaron said what he said to him, he turned to the Samiri and said to him, *And what sayest thou, Samiri?*[1074] regarding what you have fashioned, which comes from your enemy,[1075]

[1069] 20:94
[1070] 7:150
[1071] Referring to Moses' casting down in anger the tablets he had brought down from Sinai.
[1072] 20:94
[1073] Clearly this is an interpretation according to the inward and hidden. Of course, as root only God is worshipped no matter what the worshipper may think, but outwardly Moses' reaction was one of anger because the error lay in divinity being attributed to that calf alone, as will be discussed by Ibn al-'Arabi later in the chapter. It is not clear, however, just how Ibn al-'Arabi gleams this metaphysical exchange from the words of Moses and Aaron to one another. It is typical of his method of interpreting the Quran by reversing the characters and the motives by reading outward events as symbols of inward realities.
[1074] 20:95
[1075] Referring to Satan.

specifically into the form of a calf, fashioning this figure from the jewelry of the people so that it seize their hearts on account of their treasure? And indeed Jesus said to the Children of Israel, "O Children of Israel, the heart of each man is with his treasure, so place thy treasure in the heavens, and thy hearts shall be in the heavens." He called it treasure, because in its essence it is such that hearts incline to it in worship.[1076] It is most commonly the highest aim in a heart, owing to the needfulness it has for it.

Forms do not abide, and the form of the calf would necessarily have gone away had Moses not hastened in burning it. Zeal overcame him and he burned it. He then scattered the ashes of that form in the sea, and he said to him, *Look on your divinity*,[1077] calling it "divinity" by way of instruction and teaching, since he knew that it was one of the divine loci of self-disclosure.

I shall assuredly burn it: The animality of man disposes over the animality of animals, owing to God's having subjugated them to man, and all the more so here since its origin was not animal. It was more subject, for the non-animal has no will; indeed, it falls under the control of he who disposes over it without objection.[1078] As for animals, they possess will and desire, and it may be that some objection comes from them when one deals with them. If within them there is the power to manifest this, they will show defiance to what man wants from them. If they do not have this power, or if one has the same desire as the animal, they obey submissively to what is desired of them, just as one obeys the command of one's equal regarding something by which God has elevated him. He does so because of the wealth he hopes to gain from him, which in some circumstances is called a wage. This is spoken of in His Words, *We have raised some of them above others in degree, that some of them may take others in subjugation*.[1079] He only subjugated the one to he who is his equal with respect to his animality, not his humanity, for two equals are contraries. In his humanity the higher subjugates by his rank, through wealth or position, while that other is subjugated to him—either through fear or expectation—through his animality. One's equal cannot be subjugated to him. Do you not see the discord among beasts on account of their being equals? For two equals are contraries, and to this point He said that *We raised some of them above others in degree*. One is not found together with another in his degree. Subjugation occurs on account of these degrees.[1080]

[1076] The word for "treasure" is *mal*, which comes from a similar root as the verb *mala*, meaning "to incline". (Actually *mal* comes from m-w-l while *mala* comes from m-y-l.)

[1077] 20:97

[1078] That is to say, the golden calf was not at root an animal, and so it was even more subject to man that animals who are in any case subject to man.

[1079] 43:32

[1080] God endows all people differently, whether it be intellectually, spiritually, or materially. Insofar as a man is subject to another man in the way described here, it is due to his animal nature, which Ibn al-'Arabi here uses to refer to man's fear of loss or his desire for gain. These are things man shares with

Subjugation is of two kinds. There is the subjugation which desired by the subjugator, who in his subjugation dominates over the subjugated individual, such as the master's subjugating his slave (though he is his equal in humanity) or the sultan's subjugation over his subjects (though they are his equals), for he dominates over them by his degree. The other kind is subjugation by state, such as the subjects' subjugation of the king in his being at their command to defend and protect them, to kill their enemies and guard their wealth and their lives against them. These are all part of the subjugation that comes from the subjects by virtue of their state. By means of it they subjugate their kings. In reality it is called the subjugation by function. Function controls him in this.[1081] Among kings there are those who strive for themselves. Also among them are those who know the affair and know that by virtue of function they fall under the subjugation of their subjects. They know their lot and their rights. God rewards them for this as He would those who know the affair *as it is*.[1082] Rewards such as these come from God owing to His looking to the labours of His slaves. The entire world subjugates by state the one who cannot be called subjugated. God most high said, *Every day He is upon some labour*.[1083]

The fact that Aaron was not able to effectively deter the people of the calf, such that he could gain control over it as Moses had, was a wisdom from God appearing in existence, whose purpose was for Him to be worshipped in every form. Were that form to vanish away, it would not have done so until it had been clothed in divinity in the sight of the worshipper. That is why there are no species that are not worshipped, either as the worship of deification or the worship of subjugation.[1084] In the sight of one who understands, this must be so. Nothing in the world is worshipped until it is clothed with exaltation in the sight of the worshipper and until it is manifests through a degree in his heart. For this reason the Real has been named to us as *Raiser-of-degrees*,[1085] for one does not say, "Raiser of the degree." The degrees are many within a single identity. Indeed, He has decreed that nothing shall be

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animals. As *insan* all human beings are equal and one cannot dominate over the other, but because man comprises degrees of animal nature he is subject to the hierarchy of subjection and subjugation by virtue of the needs and wants that are part and parcel of being an animal and possessing an animal soul.

[1081] Both subjugation by state (*al-taskhir bi'l-hal*) and subjugation by function (*al-taskhir bi'l-martabah*) relate to the theme found throughout the *Ringstones* of a determiner being determined by what it determines. There is an unequal yet reciprocal relationship of determination between a ruler and his subjects, because his power over them entails a certain power which they have over him (if he is a good ruler).

[1082] That is, a good and just ruler of this sort will be rewarded by God as those who have realized true knowledge.

[1083] 55:29. The one who cannot be called subjugated is God, who is "subjugated" by the world insofar as the world is necessary for the manifestation of the Divine Names.

[1084] The worship of deification (*ta'alluh*) is the conscious attribution of divinity to a thing, as in the worship of idols. In the worship of subjugation (*taskhir*) one worships a thing due to the power it has over the desires in his heart, spoken of in the verse discussed below, *Hast thou seen him who has taken his desires to be his divinity?*

[1085] *Rafi al-darajat*, 40:15

worshipped but Him in multiple and diverse degrees, each degree being given a divine locus of self-disclosure wherein He is worshipped.

The greatest and most exalted locus of self-disclosure wherein He is worshipped is that of desires. Remember that He has said, *Hast thou seen him who has taken his desires to be his divinity?*[1086] They are the greatest object of worship, for nothing is worshipped except through them, and He is not worshipped except by virtue of His Essence, and concerning this I say:

By desire's truth, desire causes desire
If not for desires in the heart, desires would be worshipped not

Do you not see how perfect God's knowledge of things is, how He perfects one who worships his desires and takes them to be his divinity? He said, *And God has led him astray knowingly*,[1087] and this leading astray is bewilderment. He sees this worshipper worshipping only his desires, complying with their command to worship the individual whom he worships. Even his worship of God comes from his desires. If one did not have a desire for the Divine—which is a will based on love—one would not worship God, nor would one prefer Him to another. Likewise, anyone who worships some form of the world and makes it a divinity only does so because of desire. The worshipper is forever under the influence of his desires. Now, He sees the objects of worship diversified amongst the worshippers, and each one who worships something cries disbelief to one who worships something else. One who has the least bit of awareness will be bewildered at the unanimity of desires, indeed, at the unity of desires, for it is a single identity in every worshipper. *And God has led him astray*, that is, bewildered him, *out of knowledge*, such that each worshipper worships only his desires and such that only his desires can capture his worship, whether this coincides with a prescribed command or not.[1088]

The perfected knower is he who sees every object of worship as a locus of self-disclosure of the Real wherein to worship Him. For this reason they all call it[1089] divinity along with its specific name of 'stone', 'tree', 'animal', 'man', 'star', or 'angel'. All are names proper to the individuality within them.[1090] Divinity is a

[1086] 45:23
[1087] 45:23
[1088] One can refer to the Ringstone of Noah for the relationship between bewilderment and being led astray. The essence of this paragraph is that all desire is nothing more or less than our desire for God, though we may be mindless of this fact. God is the unity underlying all desires, and hence is even the object of desire when one seeks after something that is impermissible in the eyes of the Divine Law. Even more fundamentally, all desire is nothing other than the desire of God for Himself.
[1089] That is, the object of worship.
[1090] Those who have attained true knowledge will say that such and such an object is divine but will do so in the proper way. They see all things as being self-disclosures of God, but at their own level this does not take away from their individual reality. In no case is the word "divine" used for these objects in an unqualified way. That is why they marvel at the idea of making all the gods into one, for they

degree which its worshipper imagines to be the degree of his object of worship. In reality it is a locus of self-disclosure of the Real in the eyes of this worshipper who is devoted to this object of worship in this specific locus of self-disclosure. For this reason some who know ignorantly say,[1091] *We only worship them that they may bring us nigh in nearness unto God*,[1092] though they call them 'divinity', to the point of saying, *What, has he made the divinities one divinity? This is indeed a marvelous thing*.[1093] They did not deny Him, but marveled, for they held fast to the multiplicity of forms and their attribution of divinity to them.[1094] The Messenger came and called them to a single God, who is known but not witnessed.[1095] He used their own testimony to the effect that, in their sight, they affirmed Him and believed in Him, namely their saying, *We only worship them that they may bring us nigh in nearness to God*, since they knew that those forms were made of stone. That is why the proof was established against them in His Words, *Say, "Name them,"*[1096] for they only name them using names they know to possess a reality.[1097]

As for those who know the affair *as it is*, they are manifest in a form that rejects the forms that are worshipped. Their station in knowledge grants them that they be determined by the moment, owing to the determination over them of the Messenger in whom they believe. It is by virtue of this that they are called believers. They are worshippers of the moment, though they know that they did not worship those forms themselves, but only worshipped God in them by virtue of the influence of the self-disclosure which they knew to be found in them. The denier, who has no knowledge of what self-discloses, is ignorant of it, while the perfected knower—prophet, messenger, or heir—veils it.[1098] He orders them to distance themselves from

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believe in a real multiplicity of divinities while the truth is one divinity disclosing Himself in a multiplicity of forms.

[1091] That is, they *know* in the sense that they acknowledge God, but their statement betrays their ignorance of how God is to be worshipped.

[1092] 39:3

[1093] 38:5

[1094] The error of the idol-worshippers is to attribute divinity to God and to the idol in the same way. Unlike the true knowers, the idol-worshippers do not set up the proper relationship between God and one of His forms of self-disclosure. For them, the idol is at best a lesser god through which one can reach the greatest god *Allah*.

[1095] As the One, God cannot be witnessed. To witness something is to not witness something else, which cannot be said of God as the One. It is by virtue of a self-disclosure or manifestation that God can be witnessed. However, God can be *known* as the single God, but this is *in* the forms not *as* the forms.

[1096] 13:33

[1097] When they are called upon to name them, they can only give their proper names of 'tree' or 'stone' because

[1098] That is, in the objects of worship. Even those who know the reality as it is will outwardly reject the worship of form, in keeping with their moment in cosmic history where the worship of forms is no longer safe and leads to polytheism. They acknowledge the reality of God in all forms, but also acknowledge the mission of the Prophet and the special and necessary character of his revelation at this time in human history. The ordinary believer denies such worship out of ignorance, where the true knower denies it (outwardly) out of wisdom.

them, following the Messenger and hoping for God to love them, in accord with His Words, *Say: If you love God, follow me, and God will love you*.[1099] He invited to a divinity in whom recourse is taken, and who is known by virtue of the whole, but who is not witnessed. *No vision perceiveth Him*, rather, *He perceiveth all vision*, owing to His subtlety and His penetration of the identities of things. *No vision perceiveth Him*, just as it does not perceive spirits governing their manifest figures and forms.[1100] *And He is the Subtle, the Informed*.[1101] Being informed is a tasting, and tasting is a self-disclosure, and self-disclosure is in forms. The one must be and the other must be. Thus there must be those who worship Him through their desires, if you understand.[1102]

And the final purpose of the path is with God.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Moses

The wisdom in the children being slain because of Moses was this: that the life of each one slain because of him would revert to him as a source of strength, for each was slain for fear of being Moses. Therein was no ignorance. It had to be that their life revert to Moses, meaning the life of those slain because of him. Theirs was the pure life of the *fitrah*,[1103] unsoiled by the purposes of the soul; indeed, they were of the *fitrah* of the *Am I not your Lord*.[1104] Thus Moses was the sum-total of the life of those slain for fear of being him. Everything that was made ready for each slain person—its preparedness for its spirit—was contained in Moses, upon him be peace. This was a special divine favor for Moses, possessed by none before him.[1105] The

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[1099] 3:71

[1100] The analogy here is that physical vision as such cannot perceive the spirit that governs a particular form. No matter how exalted the level of vision, man can never see the Self that discloses Itself in all forms the way he sees those forms, no matter the ontological level of those forms.

[1101] 6:103

[1102] The "one" and the "other" simply translate a feminine and masculine pronoun. The first most likely refers to the "forms" mentioned in the previous sentence. Qaysari understands the masculine pronoun to be referring to God, but it could also refer to "self-disclosure". The point here is that God discloses Himself by his nature, and so self-disclosure must be. But the self-disclosure necessarily entails forms, and so forms must be. Within the world of forms arise beings whose very life and consciousness entail love and desire. This love, which is none other than a disclosure of the Divine Love, entails the worship and seeking that has been discussed in this chapter.

[1103] That is, one's primitive or primordial norm.

[1104] From the Quranic verse 7:173 *Alastu bi-Rabbikum?* (*Am I not your Lord?*)

[1105] Both Qaysari and Qashani attempt to explain this passage in terms of the universality and particularity of spirits. The spirits of prophets, according to this view, are universal (*kulli*), while the spirits of those who are members of their communities are particular (*juz'i*). Of particular note is the Quranic verse, *Abraham was a community obedient unto God*. (26:120) According to this conception, the spirit of a prophet can encompass the particular spirits of the community members the way a universal Name of God can encompass a particular Name of God.

This does not strike me as being quite satisfactory, because it does not make good metaphysical sense to speak of one individual soul being subsumed into another. I take the statement, "Everything that was made ready for each slain person," to mean that Moses was given the vital spirit that would

wisdom of Moses was manifold, and if God so wills, I shall set out some of it in this chapter, in the measure of the Divine Command that enters into my thoughts. This is the beginning of what rehearsed unto me of this chapter.

Thus Moses was not born except as being the sum-total of many spirits and the gathering of active faculties/powers, for indeed the small acts upon the great. Do you not see the special way in which a child influences an adult, such that the adult comes down to him from his position of authority to play with him and hold him in his arms, and brings himself down to his level of intelligence? He subjugates him, though he is unaware of it. Then he causes him to be occupied with raising him and protecting him, such that he sacrifices his own ease and well-being so that he might not become upset. All of this is part of the influence of the small upon the great. This stems from the strength of the station, for indeed the younger is newly arrived and knows its Lord, being newly arrived in terms of being brought into being; the older is thus more distant. It is like the case of those who are close to a king, who, due to their closeness to him, dominate those who are farther from him. The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, would go out into the rain when it fell and expose his head to it, in order to be touched by it, and would say, "It is newly arrived and knoweth its Lord."[1106] Contemplate this knowledge of God coming from the Prophet, how glorious, exalted, and clear! The rain subjugated the best of mortal men owing to its closeness to its Lord. It resembled the messenger who descended to bring him revelation. It called him by state and essence, and he went out into it so that what it brought from its Lord might touch him. Were it not for the divine benefit he attained through what touched him of it he would not have gone out into it. This is one message of water, from which God made every living thing, so understand.

Now let us speak of the wisdom of his being placed in the ark and being cast into the sea. The ark was his *nasut*,[1107] while the sea was the knowledge he attained through the mediation of that body, given to him through the meditative and contemplative faculty and by the faculties of sensory perception and imagination. Neither they nor their like can be possessed by the human soul except through the existence of this elemental body. Now, since this soul is actualized in this body and is commanded to dispose within it and to govern it, God gave it these faculties as instruments by which to attain to what God desires of it in its governance of this ark

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have been given to those souls had they lived out their lives in this world. The vital spirit or animal soul is at a level below the human or rational soul, and is the intermediate between the human soul and the body. This "spirit" (which is below the soul as opposed to the other kind of spirit which is above, and both go by the name *ruh*) can be separated from a human soul/spirit without destroying it. Indeed, at the resurrection the nature of this spirit will change while the soul's core abides. It seems plausible to me that Ibn al-'Arabi means to say that Moses was granted the strength, life, and power that would have belonged to those other children at that level of being.

[1106] Muslim, 9:13

[1107] That is, his bodily nature. See Ringstone of Jesus, p.***.

that contains the Lord's presence.[1108] He was cast into the sea so that he would attain the many kinds of knowledge through these faculties. Through this He showed that, even though its governing spirit is its master, it governs it through none other than itself. He appointed these faculties, brought into being, to be the companions of this *nasut*, which in the language of symbolism and the wisdom is referred to as an ark.[1109]

Now, such is the Real's governance of the world. He governs it through none other than itself or its form. He governs it through none other than itself, such as the child who relies upon the existentiation of the parent; or that which is occasioned relying upon its occasion; or of that which is conditioned upon its condition; or of that which is caused upon its cause; or of that which is proven upon its proof; or of that which is realized upon its reality. These are all part of the world and the Real's governance within it. He thus governs it through none other than itself.[1110]

As for our words, "or its form,"[1111] by which is meant the form of the world, I am referring to the Most Beautiful Names and the Exalted Qualities by which the Real is named and described. No Name by which He is named reaches us without our finding the meaning and spirit of that Name in the world. So too is it that He only governs the world through the form of the world. That is why of the creation of Adam, who is the Model[1112] that unites the Qualities of the Divine Presence—Essence, Qualities, and Acts—he says, "Indeed God created Adam in His Image."[1113] His Image is naught but the Divine Presence. In this noble Epitome, Perfect Man, He existentiated all the Divine Names as well as all the realities found outside of him in the macrocosm. He made him the spirit of the world, subjugating both the exalted and the lowly to him by reason of the perfection of his form. Just as there is nothing in the world that does not glorify with His praises, so too there is nothing in the world

[1108] Reference to 2:248, *The sign of his kingship is that the Ark will come to you, in it a* sakinah *from your Lord, and a remnant of what the folk of Moses and Aaron's folk left behind, the angels bearing it*. Arberry translates *sakinah* as its Hebrew cognate Shechina. Wehr lists the presence or immanence of God as one of the meanings of *sakinah*, which usually means tranquility or calmness, and the commentaries seem to support such a translation as well. Of course, this is a different ark than the Ark of the Covenant. Ibn al-'Arabi is surely doing nothing more than taking advantage of the association of the words *tabut* ("ark") and *sakinah*.

[1109] To journey through the seas of knowledge the human soul first needs its body. It is by residing in a body while that body journeys through the world that the soul grows and develops. The soul is cast into the world by means of its body just as Moses was cast into the sea by means of the ark. The powers of the soul mentioned exist by virtue of the soul's relation to the body. The spirit governs the body through none other than the body itself, which is to say that although the spirit controls the body it does so *in* the body.

[1110] That is to say, God works in the world through 'horizontal' causes and relationships. The aforementioned are examples of concepts and concrete entities that can only exist in relation to one another, for God not only acts directly but also, so to speak, indirectly.

[1111] Referring back to the first sentence of the previous paragraph, meaning that God governs the world through its form.

[1112] The word *birnamij* is extremely difficult to capture in English. Ibn al-'Arabi uses it to describe Man as the "summing up" of all the Divine Qualities in the world, a topic discussed in the introduction.

that is not subjugated to man, by reason of what is granted him by the reality of his form. God most high said, *And He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all together, from Him*.[1114] Thus everything in the world is subject to man. Whosoever knows this knows it, and such is the Perfect Man, and whosoever is ignorant of it is ignorant of it, and such is animal man.

The form of his being placed in the ark and of the ark's being placed in the sea was one of loss, but inwardly he was being saved from murder. He was given life, just as souls are quickened with knowledge after the death of ignorance. Recall that God said, *Why, is he who was dead*, meaning, through ignorance, *and We gave him life*, meaning, through knowledge, *and appointed for him a light to walk by among the people*, and this is guidance, *as one whose likeness is in the darkness*, and this is error, *and comes not forth from it?*[1115] This means that such a one is never guided, for indeed reality has no end where one might come to a rest. Now, guidance is that man should be guided to bewilderment, and know that the affair *is* bewilderment and that bewilderment is unrest and motion, and that motion is life, without stillness and so without death, and is existence without non-existence.[1116]

This is so with water, by which the earth possesses life and movement. It is spoken of in His Words, *It quivers*, and its pregnancy is spoken of in His Words, *and swells*, while its giving birth is spoken of in His Words, *and puts forth every wonderful pair*. [1117] That is to say, something gives birth only to what resembles it, i.e., to what is similar to it in nature. Thus it[1118] possesses pair-ness, which is its even-numberedness, by virtue of what is born of it and manifests from it.[1119] The Real's existence possesses multiplicity in the same way. The multiplicity of the Names consists in His being such and such through the world which manifests from Him, which in its makeup seeks after the realities of the Divine Names.[1120] Through

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[1113] Bukhari 79:1

[1114] 45:13

[1115] 6:122

[1116] That is to say, even when a person is guided out of darkness into the light, this light entails bewilderment in the Divine Reality. Here again Ibn al-'Arabi understands misguidance as an esoteric expression of bewilderment in the positive sense. There is no end to the self-disclosure of God, and no matter how far one journeys through the light the never-ending expressions of the Real will always have the power to maintain the sojourner in his state of lucid drunkenness.

[1117] This passage (22:5) is preceded by a description of a human being's development in the womb, his coming of age, his growing old, and his gain and loss of knowledge. Then it reads, *And thou beholdest the earth blackened, then, when We send down water upon it, it quivers, and swells, and puts forth every wonderful pair*.

[1118] That is, the world.

[1119] The world is fundamentally dual as is alluded to in 36:36, *Glory be to Him, who created all the pairs of what the earth produces, and of themselves, and of what they know not.* The very nature of the world is made up of active and passive, masculine and feminine, and thus gives rise to such pairs in endless diversity from the animal to the mineral level.

[1120] The "same way" mentioned here is meant to set up and analogy between the infinity of Divine Names giving rise to the multiplicity in the world and the pair-ness or duality inherent in the nature of the world giving rise to pair-ness and duality in natural things. The one God is such and such Quality

it and through its Creator the unity of multiplicity is affirmed. It is one in identity with respect to its essence, just as the *hylic* substance is one in identity with respect to its essence and is multiple by virtue of the manifest forms it bears in itself. Similarly the Real, by virtue of the forms of self-disclosure which manifest from Him, is the locus of self-disclosure for the forms of the world, although the object of intellect[1121] is one. Contemplate how beautiful this divine instruction is, with whose understanding God favors whatever slaves He wills.

Since the family of Pharaoh found him in the sea near the tree, Pharaoh named him Musa, *mu* meaning 'water' in Coptic and *sa* meaning 'tree'. He named him after the place where they found him, for the ark came to rest in the sea near the tree. He intended to kill him, but his wife said what she said to him. She was made to pronounce divine speech in what she said to Pharaoh, for God most high created her for perfection. Recall that the Prophet spoke of her, peace be upon him, bearing witness that she and Mary the daughter of Imran possessed the perfection proper to men.[1122] She said to Pharaoh, speaking of Moses, *He will be a comfort to me and thee*.[1123] She was comforted by him by virtue the perfection she had attained, as we have said. He was a comfort to Pharaoh through the faith God bestowed upon him when he drowned. He took him pure and purified, with no wickedness, for he took him at the moment of his faith, before he could earn any sins. The act of submission removes whatever came before. Out of His solicitude, which He grants to whomsoever He wills, He made him a sign so that none might despair of God's Mercy, "*Of God's Spirit none despair except the people of the unbelievers.*"[1124] Had Pharaoh been one of those who despaired he would not have hastened on to faith. Moses, upon him be peace, was as spoken of by the wife of Pharaoh, *He will be a comfort for me and thee . . . perchance he will profit us*.[1125] And that is what happened, for indeed through him God profited them both, although they were unaware that he was the prophet who would bring about the ruin of the kingdom of Pharaoh and his people.

After God made him safe from Pharaoh *the heart of Moses' mother became empty*[1126] from the grief that had afflicted her. Then God forbade him to be suckled by any wet nurse, so that he could receive the breast of his mother and let her give him suck, and thus would complete for her the joy she found in him. It is the same

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in innumerable ways, all the while remaining the One Supreme Identity. The outward multiplicity is an expression of an inward infinity that is still a true Unity.

[1121] The forms are many, but what the intellect knows in them (*ma'qulah*, "object of intellect") is the One.

[1122] This is a reference to the tradition, "Many have become perfect among men, but among women only Mary and Asiya…" Bukhari *al-Anbiya'* 32, 46. See *Sufi Path of Knowledge* p. 296.

[1123] 28:9

[1124] 12:87

[1125] 28:9

[1126] 28:10

for the Laws' knowledge. Recall that God has said, *For each of you we have appointed a law and a way*,[1127] that is, a path. As for "way", this means that it "came from" that path.[1128] These words indicate the principle from whence it came. It is its source of nourishment, just as the branch of a tree feeds only from its root. What is forbidden in one Law is lawful in another, that is, in form, by which I refer to my saying, "…is lawful…" In reality it is not the very same as what had past, because the affair is *a new creation*[1129] without repetition.[1130] It is this that we remind you of. In the case of Moses this was symbolized by the forbiddance of the wet-nurse.

In reality one's mother is she who suckles him, not she who gives birth to him. The birth-mother bears him as a trust, and he is formed within her and feeds on her menstrual blood, this taking place without any desire on her part, so much so that there is no free-giving on her part. He only feeds on that which, were he not to feed on it and were that blood not to leave her, would damage her and cause her illness. It is the embryo that is a blessing for the mother, for he feeds on that blood and in himself protects her from the harm she would encounter were she to retain that blood within herself without its exiting, and were the embryo not to feed upon it. Suckling is not like this, for by breast-feeding her intention is for him to have life and be sustained. For Moses God made this to be his birth-mother, this privilege being given to no other woman other than his birth-mother, so that she might also be comforted by raising him and seeing him grow at her breast, *and that she might not grieve*.[1131]

Thus did God save Moses from the distress of the ark. He broke through the darkness of nature with the divine knowledge God granted him, although he did not break out of *it*.[1132] He tried him, that is, he tested him in many situations so that, within himself, he would realize his steadfastness in the face of that with which God had afflicted him. God first afflicted him in the killing of the Egyptian, something God supported and inspired him to do in his mystery, though he did not know it.[1133] Now, in his soul he was not interested in killing him, although he did not cease until

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[1127] 5:48

[1128] Here Ibn 'Arabi is linking the noun "way" (*minhaj*^{an}) to phrase "came from" (*minha ja'a*) which are phonetically almost identical. If one were to re-read the words this way, it would say, "To each we appointed a law and it (i.e. knowledge) came from it (i.e. the law or *shir'ah*)." Ibn al-'Arabi uses the word "path" (*tariqah*) to gloss *shir'ah* because *shir'ah* and *shari'ah* mean road or way. Apparently the analogy is that knowledge having to do with the Divine Laws should only be received from its true source and no other, the same way Moses would only receive milk from his birth-mother.

[1129] 13:5

[1130] That is, that which is lawful in one Law and forbidden in another is only seemingly the same, because in reality each self-disclosure is unique and there is no true repetition.

[1131] 20:40

[1132] That is, in his soul Moses broke free of the constraints of the body, which is not to say that he was able to break free from the body in an absolute way. Even the prophets are subject to the trials of the body until they die a physical death.

[1133] The "mystery" (*sirr*) refers to one of the deep levels of the Heart in the Sufi science of the soul. Moses, destined to become a prophet, could not kill a person without this having been the Will of God for him, even though Moses would be unaware as to the true cause behind his action.

his Lord's command had been fulfilled in this, for a prophet is inwardly inerrant in a way of which he is not aware until he is given news, that is, until he is informed of it. That is why Khidr showed him the slaying of the young boy. He rebuked him for slaying him, not remembering his own slaying of the Egyptian. Khidr said to him, *I did it not of my own bidding*,[1134] calling his attention to his rank before he was to be informed that, in reality, he was immune in his actions though he may not have known it.[1135] He also showed him the impairment of the boat, which was outwardly ruin, though inwardly it was deliverance from the tyrant's hand. This was made to correspond to his ark, which had held him while he was at sea. Outwardly it was ruin, but inwardly it was deliverance.[1136] His mother only did this fearing that the hand of the tyrant Pharaoh should kill her son, patiently looking upon him. She had the revelation, coming from whence she knew not, that God had granted her. Within herself she longed to suckle him, but when she feared for him she cast him into the sea, for, as in the proverb, "When the eye seeth not, the heart is afflicted not." She did not fear for him as one who was witnessing by sight, nor did she feel the sadness of seeing with her own eyes. She was occupied with the thought that God might return him to her, for this was how well she thought of Him. She lived happily in herself with this thought, for hope stands against fear and despair. When she was inspired concerning this she said, "Perhaps this is the Messenger by whose hands Pharaoh and the Egyptians shall be destroyed." She lived happily and found joy in contemplating such thoughts and imaginings$_w$, but which were, in reality, knowledge.

Then, when he was being pursued,[1137] he left fleeing, outwardly from fear, though in meaning it was out of love for being delivered. Motion is always the motion of love, but one who sees it veils it with other occasions. They are not it.[1138] This is so because the origin is the world's motion from non-existence, wherein it was

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[1134] 18:82

[1135] That is, like Moses' slaying of the Egyptian, Khidr's slaying of the young boy was the Will of God, except that in Khidr's case he had a conscious and explicit knowledge that this was the case. Ibn al-'Arabi is trying to say that Khidr was telling Moses, through example, that Moses' own killing was willed by God and was not a result of passion. The full story of Moses and Khidr is told in 18:60-86. The killing of the boy is one of three actions committed by Khidr concerning which Moses does not have the patience to keep silent, although he promises to do so. The other two are the setting up of a wall without taking wages and the impairing of a boat that had borne them, which are both mentioned below. Finally Moses speaks up again after agreeing that they would part ways if he questioned Khidr again. He does, and the two men leave one another, but not before Khidr explains to Moses the true meaning of his actions.

[1136] That is, outwardly it seemed that Khidr was damaging the boat of an innocent person, but he was actually protecting it from being seized by a tyrant. So too was Moses' journey in the ark outwardly ruinous yet was in truth a form of salvation.

[1137] Referring to Moses' flight from Egypt after killing the Egyptian.

[1138] Fear of one thing is really the love of something else. Fear is a negative entity which, like a shadow, expresses the underlying desire or love that impels us to action. All instances of love bringing about motion are expressions of the original Love of God for being known. In each act of love we seek out an aspect of God, although we think we are seeking out something else or are running in fear

still, into existence. This is why it is said that the affair is motion out of stillness. The motion which is the world's existence is the motion of love. The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, called our attention to this by relating, "I was a hidden treasure and desired be known."[1139] Were it not for this love, the world would not have been manifest in His Identity. Its motion from non-existence into existence is the motion of its Existentiator's love for it. The world also loves to witness itself in existence as it did in immutability. In every respect its motion from immutable non-existence into existence is a motion of love from the side of the Real and from its own side. Perfection is beloved in itself.[1140]

His knowledge of Himself, with respect to His being beyond need of the worlds, is His. All that remains is to complete the degree of knowledge by means of that knowledge which comes to be, which comes from these identities—the identities of the world—when they come into existence. The form of perfection is manifest through knowledge that comes to be and knowledge that is eternal. The degree of knowledge is perfected by means of two aspects.[1141] The hierarchy of existence is perfected in a similar way. In existence there is the eternal and the non-eternal, that is, that which comes to be. The eternal is the existence of the Real which is His own; the non-eternal is the existence of the Real in the forms of the immutable world (and is called coming to be), because one part of it manifests to another.[1142] He is Manifest to Himself in the forms of the world, and thus is existence perfected. And so the motion of the world is that of the love for perfection, so understand. Do you not see how he relieved the Divine Names of the absence of their effects' manifestation in the identity called the world? Indeed, ease is loved by Him, and He only attains to it

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of something. Flight stems from fear, which stems from a perception that what is loved will be lost, which leads one to move towards the preservation of what is loved.

[1139] If one were to literally translate this it would read, "…and loved that I should be known," which makes for awkward English. It is meant to tie together the theme of love which Ibn al-'Arabi is here discussing. This oft-quoted tradition is not found in the major collections.

[1140] God's love for His own manifestation finds its counterpart in the drive of man to become ever more his true self. That something in the world wishes to see itself in existence (i.e. in manifestation) as it did in its immutability (i.e. non-manifestation) means that the self is always striving to realize what it most truly is. God is the Perfect whose Perfection would be qualified and hence 'imperfect' without the manifestation of the Names and hence the world. Man is imperfection who seeks to realize his own perfection by manifesting God most perfectly. In this way both God and man desire the perfect manifestation of the Divine Names and Qualities, although from God's point of view it is an overflowing grace while from man's point of view it is needfulness and dependence.

[1141] God knows Himself absolutely and eternally without need for manifestation. He does not stand in need of the world in order to know Himself. However, the full reality of knowledge encompasses the relative, which is to say that God also knows Himself from a qualified point of view, i.e. through the world. The one reality of knowledge is not limited to being absolute, but encompasses in its wholeness the relative as well.

[1142] The same type of reasoning can be applied to the question of being or existence. God owns absolute unqualified Being, but the one Reality encompasses both absolute Being and qualified being. The non-eternal and becoming existence is so named because the different parts of this existence come to be manifest to one another from a state in which they were not so manifest. God's eternal being does not undergo this kind of change, which can only take place in the non-eternal world of becoming.

through formal existence, both exalted and lowly.[1143] Thus it is established that motion belongs to love, for there is no motion in being that is not that of love. Among those who know are those who know this, and among them are those for whom the nearest occasion veils it, owing to its control over one's state or its possession of one's soul.[1144]

Moses experienced his fear because of that Egyptian's slaying, but the fear contained his desire to be delivered from his own death. So he fled when he felt afraid, but in meaning he fled because he wished to be delivered from Pharaoh and from what he would do with him. He mentioned the nearest occasion that he experienced at that moment, which is like the form of a mortal man's body. Desire for deliverance was contained therein the same way a body contains its governing spirit. The prophets use the language of the outward to address people in a general way. They trust in the understanding of those who know and listen. The messengers only take into account the generality, for they know the rank of the people of understanding. Recall that the Prophet, upon him be peace, called our attention to this rank as it concerned gifts, "Indeed I give unto men, though others are more beloved to me, fearing lest God should cast them into the Fire."[1145] He thus took into account those of weak intellect and reasoning, who are overcome by avidity and nature. This is how knowledge has been brought, covered in a robe for those least endowed with understanding, such that one who has not plunged deeply might go no further than this robe and say, "How excellent this robe is!" considering it to be the highest degree. The man of subtle understanding, who dives for the pearls of wisdom when necessary, says, "This is the robe of a king." He contemplates the measure of the robe and its place among other articles of clothing, knowing thereby the measure of he who is clothed by the robe, thus coming to possess knowledge not attained by those who fail to know its like. Since the prophets, messengers, and heirs knew that in the world and in their communities there were people such as these, they kept to the language of the outward in their discourse, which is common to the elite and to the generality. The elite understand from it what the generality understand from it and more, and it is by virtue of this that they are rightfully called the elite. By virtue of it they are distinguished from the generality. This suffices for those who have attained knowledge. This is the wisdom of his saying, upon him be peace, *I fled from*

[1143] That is, it is through the emanation of existence that the Divine Names are relieved of the 'tension' of being non-manifested, as mentioned in the Ringstone of Hud and discussed in various places in the *Ringstones*.

[1144] A person may ascribe all sorts of reasons for his actions or the actions of others, but at root all things are motivated and set in motion by some brand of love. The nearest occasion is the apparent cause (such as fear or anger) which masks the underlying love that brings about all change and motion.

[1145] Bukhari 2:19, referring to an incident when the Prophet was distributing property and gave more to those who were seemingly less deserving of reward, out of fear of their reaction if they were given little. He did so counting on the strength of faith and detachment of those to whom he gave less.

you when I feared from you.[1146] He did not say, "I fled from you out of desire for peace and well-being."

He went to Midian and found two maidens and *drew water for them*[1147] without taking wages. *Then he turned away to the shade*, the divine shade, and said, *O my Lord, surely I have need of whatever good thou shalt have sent down upon me*. He considered his own action of watering to be the very good God sent down upon him, and he described himself as needing God for the good that is with Him. Khidr showed him the setting up of the wall without taking wages, but he criticized him for that. He reminded him of his watering without taking wages, among other things not mentioned. The Prophet even hoped, may God bless him and grant him peace, that Moses would have kept silent, upon him be peace, and not objected, so that God could have told him more of their affair, knowing thereby what Moses had been given without knowing.[1148] Had he known, he would not have rebuked Khidr in that way, he on whose behalf God had testified to Moses, having purified him and made him upright. And yet Moses forgot that God purified him and forgot as well the conditions He set for him to follow him. This is a mercy for us for when we forget the command of God. Had Moses known this, Khidr would not have said to him, "…*that thou hast never encompassed in thy knowledge*," that is to say, "I have knowledge which you have not attained, based on taste, just as you are possessed of knowledge which I do not possess."[1149] He thus behaved justly.

As for the wisdom of his separation, God says of the Messenger, *Hold to what the Messenger bringeth to you, and consider forbidden that which he forbiddeth you*.[1150] Those who know God, who know the measure of messengerhood and the Messenger, go no further than these words. Khidr knew that Moses was a Messenger of God, and so paid close attention to whatever he said, so that he might fulfill all the demands of *adab* with the Messenger. He said to him, *"If after this I question thee*

[1146] 26:21

[1147] 28:24

[1148] The commentators tell us of a tradition wherein the Prophet says, "Would that Moses (upon him be peace) had remained silent and not objected, so that God could have narrated some of their affair to us." They also mention that Ibn al-'Arabi claims to have met with Khidr in the imaginational world, and Khidr said, "For Moses son of 'Imran I had prepared one thousand of his experiences from his birth until the time of our meeting, and he had not the patience for three of them." Ibn al-'Arabi has been trying to make the point that Khidr's three doings were meant to show Moses' the significance of events in his own life, such as the destruction of the boat in relation to his own experience of being cast into the sea in the ark. In this case, Khidr reminds Moses that he too once performed a service without taking wages. Moses "had been given without knowing" in the sense that he did not consciously know his own inerrancy and the inward meaning of his life's actions. This was part of the purpose, according to Ibn al-'Arabi, of his meeting with Khidr.

[1149] According to Qaysari, this saying is attributed to Khidr, although he does not mention its source. Ibn al-'Arabi repeats a variation of it below. The excerpt mentioned here fully reads, *"And how shouldst thou bear patiently that thou hast never encompassed in knowledge?"* (18:68), referring to the patience Moses would need in order to keep silent while Khidr performed outwardly questionable actions.

[1150] 59:7

regarding any thing, keep not company with me,"[1151] forbidding him from keeping his company. When all three incidents had come to pass, he said, *"This is the separation between us*."[1152] Moses did not say to him, "Do not do this," and did not seek his company, knowing the measure of the rank that was occupied by him and which made him turn away his companionship. Moses was then silent and they separated. Contemplate the perfection of these two men, both in knowledge and in fulfilling the demands of divine *adab*, and also the just discernment of Khidr in recognizing what Moses possessed in saying, "I have knowledge God hath taught me and which ye know not, and thou hast knowledge God hath taught thee, which I know not." That Khidr should tell Moses this was the balm for the wound inflicted by, "*And how shouldst thou bear patiently that thou hast never encompassed in thy knowledge?"* though he knew the exaltedness of his degree of messengership. That degree was not possessed by Khidr.[1153]

Now, this appears in the Muhammadan community in the tradition of the pollination of the date palms.[1154] He said to his Companions, upon him be peace, "Thou knowest better what is beneficial in this, your lower-world." There is no doubt that knowledge of a thing is better than ignorance of it. That is why God praised Himself as being He who *has knowledge of all things*.[1155] The Prophet recognized, may God bless him and grant him peace, that his Companions knew better than he what was beneficial in the lower world, for in this case he had no expertise. It was knowledge acquired through experience$_{dh}$ and through practice, and the Prophet, upon him be peace, did not occupy himself in acquiring it. Nay, he was busy with the most important of things. I have called your attention to a great *adab*, which will benefit you if you apply it to yourself.

"But my Lord gave me Judgement, referring to vicegerency, *and made me one of the Messengers,"*[1156] referring to messengerhood. Not every messenger is a vicegerent. The vicegerent possesses the sword, the power of dismissal, and the authority to govern. This is not the case with a messenger, whose only duty is to preach that with which he was sent. If he fights for it and defends it by the sword, then he is a vicegerent-messenger. Just as not every prophet is a messenger, not

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[1151] 18:76
[1152] 18:78
[1153] For Ibn al-'Arabi the parting of Moses and Khidr was a demonstration of spiritual *adab* and a recognition by Khidr of Moses' spiritual rank. As a Messenger of God, Moses surpassed Khidr, although Khidr was a teacher to Moses when it came to inward things. Ibn al-'Arabi reads Moses' statement, "If after this I question thee regarding any thing, keep no company with me," as a kind of command which Khidr would not disobey, knowing Moses' rank. At the same time, Khidr softened his apparent rebuke of Moses' impatience by telling him that God had given each of them knowledge which the other did not possess. For his part, Moses did not object to the separation and kept his word.
[1154] That is, the notion that there are kinds of knowledge which the Messenger does not possess. The incident of the date-palm pollination was mentioned in the Ringstone of Seth, p.***.
[1155] 57:3
[1156] 26:21

every messenger is a vicegerent, that is, not every one is given a kingdom and the power to rule over it.

Now let us speak of the wisdom of Pharaoh's asking about the Divine Quiddity/what-It-is.[1157] He did not do so out of ignorance. He only did it to find something out, so that he could see what his answer would be, considering that he claimed to be bringing a message from his Lord—and Pharaoh knew the rank of the messengers in knowledge—and so that he could use his answer as an indication of his truthfulness. He asked a misleading question because of those who were present, in order to teach them—from whence they would not be aware—what he himself was aware of in his question. When he gave the answer of those who know the affair, Pharaoh made it appear, in order to maintain his position, that Moses had not answered his question. Thus it would appear to those present, owing to the limitation of their understanding, that Pharaoh knew more than Moses. For this reason when he did gave the answer that was appropriate—outwardly it was not the answer to what he asked, and Pharaoh knew that this would be the answer he would give—he said to his companions, "*Surely your Messenger who was sent to you is possessed!"*[1158] that is, "He is veiled[1159] from the knowledge of what I asked him, since it is inconceivable that he could know it at all." The question was proper, for to ask about the quiddity is to ask about the reality of what one is seeking. It must necessarily possess a reality on its own. Those who construct definitions out of genus and specific difference can only do so where there is some commonality. It is not necessary that He who has no genus should possess a reality in Himself not possessed by another.[1160] The question was proper according to the way followed by the Folk of the Truth, correct knowledge, and sound intellect. The only answer is the one that Moses gave. There is a great mystery here. He actually gave an answer to someone who asked about the definition of the Essence, and he made the definition of the Essence its very relationship to the forms of the world which are manifest through Him, or the forms of the world which are manifest in Him. It is as though, in response to his saying,

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[1157] In this context it is necessary to quote the passage which Ibn al-'Arabi is about to discuss at length: *'But My Lord gave me judgment and made me one of the Messengers. That is a blessing thou reproachest me with, having enslaved the Children of Israel.' Pharaoh said, 'And what is the Lord of the Worlds?' He said, 'The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, if you are certain.' Said he to those about him, 'Do you not hear?' He said, 'Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers, the ancients.' Said he, 'Surely your Messenger who was sent to you is possessed!' He said, 'The Lord of the East and the West, and what between them is, if you understand.' Said he, 'If thou takest a god other than me, I shall surely make thee one of the imprisoned.' He said, 'What, even though I brought thee something manifest?' Said he, 'Bring it then, if thou art of the truthful.' So he cast his staff, and behold, it was a serpent manifest.* (26:23-32)

[1158] 26:27

[1159] *Majnun* generally means possessed or insane, but it comes from a root meaning "to cover" and this is the connection Ibn al-'Arabi is making here.

[1160] That is, He who has no genus needs no differentia, which is to say that God does not belong to any class of things such that one would have to point out a distinguishing characteristic He possesses to the exclusion of the other members of that class.

"*And what is the Lord of the Worlds?"*[1161] he said, "He in whom the forms of the world are manifest—or He is manifest through them—both the exalted, which is the heavens, and the lowly, which is the earth." "*If you are certain."*[1162] When Pharaoh said to his companions, *"Surely he is possessed,"* with the meaning of "possessed" of which we spoke, Moses added to his elucidation, so that Pharaoh would know his station in divine knowledge, knowing that Pharaoh knew it. He said, "*The Lord of the East and the West,"*[1163] employing that which is manifest and that which is veiled. These are the Hidden and the Manifest and whatever is between, spoken of in His Words, "*He hath knowledge of all things*." "*If you understand,"* that is, if you are men who make qualifications, for indeed the intellect 'binds'.[1164] The first answer is that of those who are certain, and they are the Folk of unveiling and existence. He said, "*If you are certain,"* that is, the Folk of unveiling and existence, for I have just taught you that of which you are certain in your witnessing and in your existence. If you are not of this class, then I have answered you in my second reply, if you are the Folk of intellect, qualification, and limitation, for the Real is there in the products of your intellects' proofs. Moses appeared in both respects, so that Pharaoh would know his superiority and truthfulness. Moses knew that Pharaoh knew this—or would know this—because he had asked about the quiddity, and knew that his question did not employ the terminology of the ancients in asking, "What is it?"[1165] That is why he responded. Had he thought he was saying something else he would have pointed out the error in his question.[1166]

[1161] 26:23
[1162] 26:24
[1163] 26:28
[1164] "Understand" and "intellect" both come from *'aql* which can also mean "to bind". Hear *qayyada*, usually translated as "to qualify", is translated in its more literal sense of binding.
[1165] In one of the manuscripts the following words appear at this point, "…in asking, "What is it?" because they would not respond to a question about the quiddity of anything that did not have a genus and differentia. Now, Moses knew that, and that is why he responded…"
[1166] I will not attempt here to explain how Ibn al-'Arabi attributes this position to Pharaoh, but the argument appears to be the following: Pharaoh asked Moses to give him the what-it-is (the *mahiyyah*, or quiddity/essence) of the Lord of the Worlds. Those who were present would think that this was a standard type of philosophical question, whose correct answer would contain at the very least a reference to a genus and differentia. For example, if one asked, "What is man?" the logical definition would be, "A rational animal." Pharaoh knew that no one could correctly give that kind of answer to the question, "What is the Lord of the Worlds?" but those present did not. Then Moses gave the only correct answer that one could, which is to explain the Lord in reference to that over which He is Lord. He thus defined the Lord through what is entailed or implied by the Lord. Pharaoh then took advantage of Moses' apparent inability to answer properly and called him "possessed", which Ibn al-'Arabi interprets as "veiled". Prompted by this, Moses then continues to elucidate what God is, by referring to that which is "veiled", represented by the East, and that which is not veiled, represented by the West. To those who possess or might possess certitude, the higher knowledge is to acknowledge that God is manifest in things or that things are manifest in Him, corresponding to the explanation in terms of the heavens and the earth. If one cannot achieve this certitude and vision, then one falls into the group of qualified conceptual knowledge, corresponding to the explanation in terms of the East and the West. It seems that only Moses and Pharaoh knew one another's true intentions in asking and answering. Pharaoh, for his part, knew quite well that Moses gave the only answer possible to his

When Moses made that which he was questioned about to be the world itself,[1167] Pharaoh addressed him in this language, though his people were unaware, saying, "*If thou takest a divinity other than me, I shall surely make thee one of the imprisoned.*"[1168] The 's' in *sijn* ("prison") is an extrinsic letter.[1169] That is, "I shall surely veil thee, for you have said something to me that gives strength to my saying such a thing. Were you to say to me, 'Pharaoh, I know not this threat of yours against me, for the identity is one, so how shall I be separate…?'" Now,[1170] Pharaoh would have then said, "It is but the degrees of the identity that are separate. The identity does not undergo separation and in its essence is not divided. My degree now, Moses, is of actual control over you. I am you in identity, but other than you in degree."[1171] When Moses understood this thing he had said, he gave him his due while saying to him, "You are not able to do this."[1172] His degree testified to his power over him and to his manifesting an effect in him,[1173] because the truth was with Pharaoh at the level of manifest form. It had control over the degree in which Moses was manifest in that assembly. He said to him, manifesting that which would hold back his enemies, "*What, even though I should bring thee something clear?*"[1174] Pharaoh could do nothing but say, "*Bring it then, if thou art of the truthful,*"[1175] so that Pharaoh would not appear to be lacking in justice in the sight of the feeble minded of his people, for they were wont to doubt him. These were the group *he made unsteady* and who obeyed him. *Surely they were a people of evildoers*,[1176] that is, who go outside what is accorded by sound intelligence, namely, the denial of what Pharaoh claimed using outward language concerning the intellect, for it[1177] has a limit where one stops, and which the companion of unveiling and certainty go beyond. For

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question, and Moses knew that Pharaoh could not truly be asking for answer in terms of genus and differentia. Had he been asking in that way, according to Ibn al-'Arabi, Moses would not have answered him.

[1167] That is, when he conveyed the message that the earth and the heavens are self-disclosures of God.

[1168] 26:29

[1169] The letters in *sijn* are *sin*, *jim*, and *nun*. Ibn al-'Arabi transforms this word to evoke *janna*, written with a *jim* and a single *nun*, to bring out the meaning of "covering". No reason is given as to why the *sin* should be considered extrinsic (*za'idah*) in this case, but it no doubt has something to do with the mystical science of letters in Arabic (*al-jafr*). Each letter has a specific character of its own, but how that plays out here I do not know.

[1170] Ibn al-'Arabi stops speaking through Pharaoh's voice here and once again assumes the narrative.

[1171] Ibn al-'Arabi is using this interchange to explain the reality of hierarchy in the oneness of being. The one "identity", namely existence, is one, but from the point of view of multiplicity the relationships of power and dependence are real and not imagined. Although all reality is one, Pharaoh did in fact have a certain kind of power over Moses by virtue of his temporal authority.

[1172] I believe what this means is that Moses acknowledged the fact of Pharaoh's temporal power while knowing that he himself had God's protection and support and could not be imprisoned by Pharaoh.

[1173] That is, Pharaoh's temporal power allowed him to "manifest and effect" in Moses, i.e. to have some sort of power to effect Moses outwardly.

[1174] 26:30

[1175] 26:31

[1176] 43:54

[1177] That is, the intellect.

this reason Moses said that which would be acceptable to the possessor of certainty and in particular to the possessor of intellect.

So he cast his staff,[1178] which was the form of Pharaoh's disobedience[1179] to Moses in refusing to answer his call, *and behold it was a serpent manifest*, that is, a manifest snake. That which was an act of disobedience was transformed into an act of obedience, that is, a good work, as when He said, *God will change their evil deeds into good deeds*,[1180] that is, in their determination. The determination here became manifest as a distinct identity in a single substance. It was the staff and it was the snake, the serpent manifest. It devoured the other snakes like it by virtue of its being a snake, and the staffs[1181] by virtue of its being a staff.[1182] The proof of Moses became manifest against the proof of Pharaoh in the form of staffs, snakes, and ropes. The magicians had ropes, but Moses did not have a rope. Now "rope" means small hill,[1183] which is to say that their dimensions in relation to Moses were like that of a small hill to a towering mountain.[1184] When the magicians saw this, they knew the station of Moses in knowledge, and that what they saw was not within the scope of mortal man, and that if it were to be within the scope of mortal man it could only be possessed by one who had separated realized knowledge from imagination and illusion. They believed in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron, that is, the Lord to whom both Moses and Aaron called, because they knew that the people knew that he was not calling them to Pharaoh. Since Pharaoh possessed a position of power of control and presided over that moment, being a vicegerent of the sword—though he had deviated from the established norms of the law—he said, *I am your Lord, the Most High*.[1185] That is, "Even though everyone is a lord according to some relationship, I am the highest among you by virtue of the control over you which I have been given outwardly." When the magicians came to know the truthfulness of his words they did not deny him, but acknowledged him, saying to him, *Decide what thou wilt decide; thou canst only decide touching the life of this*

[1178] 26:32
[1179] These two words are homonyms (*'asa*) but in Arabic are written slightly differently, the first ending with an *alif* and the latter with an *alif maqsurah*. This is another instance where words with different meanings are related by root.
[1180] 25:70
[1181] This word can be read as *'asi* "disobedient person" or *'isi*, the plural of staff.
[1182] According to Qaysari the staff represents disobedience and the soul that commands to evil (*al-nafs al-'ammarah bi-l-su'*) while the snake here represents the transformed and obedient "tranquil soul" (*al-nafs al-mutma'innah*). The magician's staffs were truly staffs and falsely snakes, while that which Moses possessed could be both truly a snake and truly a staff, and it truly devoured them from whatever perspective one chooses.
[1183] Another linkage through linguistic root.
[1184] The word for "rope" (*habl*) is related to the word for "small hill" (*hibal*), and from this relation Ibn al-'Arabi understands that the ropes of the magicians signified that they were like small hills before the mountain that was Moses.
[1185] 79:24

lower world,[1186] for the state is yours. Thus his words, *I am your Lord the Most High*, were correct. Even though it was the identity of the Real, the form was Pharaoh's.[1187]

The amputation of the hands and feet and the crucifixion through the identity of the Real in a false form took place so that levels might be attained which could only be attained through those acts. There is no way to eliminate occasions, because the immutable identities demand them.[1188] Nothing is manifest in existence except in the form it possesses in immutability, since there is no changing the Words of God. The Words of God are none other than the identities of existent things. Eternity is attributed to them by virtue of their immutability, and coming to be is attributed to them by virtue of their existence and their manifestation.[1189] It is as when you say, "A person or guest has arrived for us today." It does not follow from his arrival[1190] that he had no existence before this arrival. That is why he said, in His majestic Speech—that is, in its being given forth, though His Speech is eternal—*No Remembrance from their Lord comes to them lately renewed but they turn away from it*.[1191] The All-Merciful brings only Mercy. Whosoever turns away from Mercy shall meet with chastisement, which is the absence of Mercy.

Now let us speak of His Words, *But their belief when they saw our might did not profit them—the wont of God, as in the past, touching His slaves*,[1192] except for the people of Jonah.[1193] This does not mean that it will not profit them in the Hereafter, since He spoke of the people of Jonah as an exception. What He means is that it will not save them from being taken in the lower-world, and it was for that reason that Pharaoh was taken, even though he did believe. This is the case for one

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[1186] 20:72

[1187] Ibn al-'Arabi does not mean to say that the words were correct in an absolute way, for the word "lord" (*rabb*) in Arabic as in English can be used to refer to several levels of authority, from the divine to the human.

[1188] This refers to Pharaoh's threat against the magicians after their belief in Moses. As has been discussed elsewhere, imperfection, pain, and suffering form a mysterious part of the divine economy as it concerns the world. To live in the world is to necessarily suffer, but this suffering always carries a meaning of which we may or may not be aware. The "false form" is Pharaoh, for he is doubly false: firstly by claiming too much for himself, and secondly in being none other than the self-disclosure of the Real in a certain form. It is in this way that Pharaoh is an occasion, a tool by which the Will of God is carried out on earth. Outwardly it is true that Pharaoh punishes, but inwardly and ultimately it is God tending to the individual destinies of souls. Moreover, the punishment is none other than a part of their very identity, an unfolding of what they must become.

[1189] All things are Words of God, sustained upon the Breath of the All-Merciful. It is so whether one speak of things in the state of immutability or in external manifestation. Like existence and knowledge, the reality of the Words of God encompass both the eternal and the becoming, without the becoming in any taking away from the eternal.

[1190] In ordinary language *huduth*, which has been translated as a technical term as "coming to be", can also mean arrival or something happening newly (as in the upcoming verse where *muhdath* is rendered as "lately renewed").

[1191] 21:2

[1192] 40:85

who is certain of being taken away that very moment. The context shows that he was not certain of being taken away, because he saw the believers walking on the dry path which had appeared when Moses struck the sea with his staff. Pharaoh was not certain of his destruction when he believed, unlike a man on the verge of death, so the two should not be confused. He believed in what the Children of Israel believed, certain of their salvation. He was certain just as they were, but not in the manner he had wished. God delivered him from the chastisement of the Hereafter in his soul, and delivered his body. Remember that He said, *So today We shall deliver thee with thy body, that thou mayest be sign to those after thee*.[1194] He did so because if his form had disappeared his people might have said that he had been hidden. His familiar form, now dead, appeared so that it would be known to be him. Thus deliverance was his in all ways, both in the sensory and in meaning. Those against whom is realized the Word of the chastisement of the Hereafter *will not believe, though every sign come to them, till they see the grievous chastisement*, that is, until they taste the punishment of the Hereafter. Pharaoh had left this group. All of this is clear, and is related in the Qur'an. Furthermore, let us add to this that his affair returns to God, since his chastisement has been well-established in the souls of the generality of the people, though they have no explicit text to prove this. As for his people, the judgment concerning them is different, and this is not the place for it.[1195]

Know that God does not take anyone except as a believer, i.e., one who is true to what the divine sayings relate; now, here I am referring to those on the verge of death. It is for this reason that sudden death and being killed unawares are so feared. As for sudden death, it is defined thus: that the entering breath exits without the exiting breath entering. This is sudden death, which is not the same as one on the verge of death. The same is true for death during inattention, by a blow to one's neck from behind without one's knowledge: such a one is taken according to whatever faith or disbelief was his. It was for this reason that the Prophet said, upon him be peace, "One is assembled as he was when he died,"[1196] in the same way he was taken as he was. The one on the verge of death is ever witnessing. He has faith in what is

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[1193] *Why was there never a city that believed, and its belief profited it?—Except the people of Jonah*. (10:98) That is, according to Ibn al-'Arabi interpretation, their act of faith benefited them in the world as well as in the Hereafter.

[1194] 10:92

[1195] Ibn al-'Arabi's language is fairly clear here, although his argument may be controversial. On his view, Pharaoh did not believe in the face of certain doom. Rather, he believed at the sight of the Children of Israel crossing the dry seabed. He believed as they did, but it was not the same for him because he was indeed destined to die, although he did not know it at that moment. Pharaoh was not of the group mentioned in the verse, *who will not believe, though every sign come to them*, for he did believe when certain signs came. But it was too late to save him from death, although he attained to the salvation associated with the act of faith. Most Muslims, Ibn al-'Arabi claims, believe that Pharaoh's fate in the afterlife was one of punishment, but the Shaykh says there is no explicit proof for this assertion.

[1196] That is, one is raised up on the Day of Judgment as he was when he died.

there. He is only taken as he was, because "was"[1197] is a word having to do with existence and is not associated with time except in certain contexts. Thus there is a difference between the infidel who dies awaiting death and the infidel who is killed unawares or who suddenly dies, remembering what we have said regarding the definitions of sudden death.

Now let us speak of the wisdom of the self-disclosure and speech in the form of the fire. This took place because it was what Moses desired. He disclosed Himself to him in what he sought after in order to make it acceptable to him and so that he would not turn away from it. Had he disclosed Himself to him in a form other than the one he was seeking he would have turned away from it, because he had gathered together all his resolution for that one sought after thing. Had he turned away, his act would have recoiled upon him and the Real would have turned away from him, but he was a chosen one and one brought near. It was part of his closeness that He should have disclosed Himself to him in what he was seeking without him knowing.[1198]

Recall the fire of Moses, which he saw with his need's eye
He is the Divinity, but he knows Him not

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Self-Sufficiency in the Word of Khalid

Now let us speak of the Wisdom of Khalid ibn Sinan.[1199]

[1197] The non-temporal meaning of *kana* ("was") was discussed in the Ringstone of Luqman, p.***. What Ibn al-'Arabi means here is that the "was" does not refer to some distant past time but to the very moment of death.

[1198] *So when Moses had accomplished the term and departed from his household, he observed on the side of the Mount a fire. He said to his household, 'Tarry you here; I observe a fire. Perhaps I shall bring you news of it, or a faggot from the fire, that haply you shall warm yourselves.' When he came to it, a voice cried from the right bank of the watercourse, in the sacred hollow, coming from the tree : 'Moses, I am God, Lord of the Worlds.'* (28:29-30) This symbolizes the truth that God self-discloses to each person in accordance with the receptivity of that person's heart. Although the beliefs and desires of an individual soul limit his or her conception of God, it is through these very ideas and beliefs that a person is able to approach Him. That God should have appeared to Moses in a form after which he was seeking shows that God wanted Moses to approach Him through that form. God discloses Himself to certain people in a way that would be utterly rejected by others, and the reverse is also true.

[1199] Khalid ibn Sinan is considered to have been a prophet after the time of Jesus but before the time of Muhammad. Islamic tradition teaches that there were no prophets or messengers between Jesus and Muhammad. Khalid ibn Sinan was a man who lived close enough in time to Muhammad that the Prophet is said to have met his daughter. According to the account given in the commentaries, Khalid was a man of extraordinary spiritual power, and by use of his staff was able to counter a fire that was engulfing his land in Aden. He chased the fire back into the cave from whence it came, and then made plans to enter the cave in order to extinguish the fire completely. He ordered his people to call for him after waiting no less than three days. He said that if they called him before the appointed time it would lead to his death. They waited two days, and then in their haste they cried to him, and he came out with a wound on his head caused by their early summons. He said, "You have failed me, and my word and my pledge have failed you." He then said he would die, and ordered them to bury him. Then,

Through his claim he proclaimed the prophethood of the *barzakh*. He did not presume to bring news thereof until after his death. He ordered that he be disinterred, so that he could be questioned and tell them that what is in the *barzakh* is an image of the lower-world. They would then know the truthfulness of all the messengers concerning the news they brought while living in this lower-world. Khalid's intention, may God bless him and grant him peace, was that the entire world should believe in what the messengers brought, so that he might be a "mercy for the worlds". He was ennobled by his own prophethood's proximity to the prophethood of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. He knew that God sent him as a *mercy for the worlds*.[1200] Khalid was not a messenger, so he wished to attain a large share of the mercy of the Muhammadan message. He was not ordered to convey a message, so he wished to obtain this in the *barzakh*, in order to become stronger in his knowledge of creation. But his people failed him. The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, described his people as having failed him. It was because they did not do what he wanted that he described them as having failed their prophet.

Did God grant him the reward of his hope? There is no doubt or disagreement about his having the reward of his hope. The only doubt and disagreement concern the reward of the sought after thing. Does hoping for its occurrence in the absence of its occurrence equal its occurrence in existence or not? There are many instances in the Law supporting their equality. There is, for example, the person who comes to offer the Prayer in congregation but misses it. Such a one has the reward of one who was present in the congregation. There is also the one who hopes, though he is poor, to perform good deeds akin to those possessed of wealth and riches; he has a reward equal to theirs. But equaling their reward in their intention or in their deed, since they had both the intention and the deed? The Prophet did not make explicit reference to either one of these two. It would seem that the two are not the same, which is why Khalid ibn Sinan sought to preach, so that he could rightly possess the station that would unite the two affairs, and thus attain two rewards. And God knoweth best.

Ringstone of the Wisdom of Uniqueness in the Word of Muhammad

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after period of forty days, they were to disinter him so that he could give them an account of the things he saw in the world of the *barzakh*. The appointed day came, and certain signs that Khalid foretold came to pass, and those who believed in Khalid sought to follow his wishes, but his children refused to bring out Khalid, having lost faith and fearing the disgrace of exhuming their father's dead body. When the Prophet met the daughter of Khalid, he said, "Welcome, O daughter of a prophet whose people failed him." The apparent contradiction between the orthodox belief that there were no prophets between Muhammad and Jesus and the alleged prophethood of Khalid can be resolved if one recognizes that Khalid was not a prophet before his journey through the *barzakh* of death, and in fact was not able to realize his prophethood because his people failed to carry out his wishes. His claim was that he could bring news from the other world, but he did not claim that he would be able to do so until after his death, unlike the other prophets who are able to do so in life.

[1200] 21:107

His Wisdom is that of uniqueness[1201] because he is the most perfect existent in this species of man. That is why the affair begins with him and is sealed by him. He was a prophet "while Adam was between water and clay."[1202] Then he was the Seal of the Prophets in his elemental makeup.[1203] The first of odd-numbered things is the ternary, and all other individuals after this initial instance derive from it.[1204] He was, upon him be peace, the best proof of his Lord, for he was given the all-comprehensive words, which are those things named by the names of Adam. He resembled a proof in his ternariness, and this proof is a proof of himself.[1205] Since his reality grants the initial odd-numberedness by virtue of which he is ternary in makeup, he said, speaking of love, which is the principle of existent things, "Three things have been made worthy for me to love,"[1206] through the ternariness within him. Then he mentioned women, perfume, and that his comfort has been placed in the Prayer. He began by mentioning women and ended with the Prayer, because woman is a part of man in the principle of her identity's manifestation.

Man's knowledge of himself precedes his knowledge of his Lord. Indeed his knowledge of his Lord results from his knowledge of himself. That is why he said, upon him be peace, "Whoso knoweth himself knoweth his Lord." If you wish you can say that the knowledge spoken of in this saying is impossible, or that one cannot attain to it, for it allows of this. Or if you wish you can acknowledge this knowledge. The first means that you know that you cannot know yourself, and hence cannot know your Lord. The second means that you can know yourself and hence can know your Lord.[1207]

Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, was the clearest proof of his Lord. Each part of the world is a proof of its principle, which is its Lord, so

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[1201] The word *fardiyyah* can mean both being solitary and one and also being odd-numbered.

[1202] Bukhari 78:19

[1203] See Ringstone of Seth, p.***.

[1204] In this passage "uniqueness", "odd-numbered", and "individual" all come from *fard*, which contains all of these meanings. This initial ternary can be the Self, the Presence of the Divine Names, and the Spirit, from which all things come. If we were to recall what Ibn al-'Arabi said in the Ringstone of Salih, we could say that this ternary is the Divine Essence, the Divine Will, and the Divine Command. To this ternary corresponds the human ternary consisting of one's immutable identity, one's obedience to the command of existence, and one's hearing that command.

[1205] He is speaking here of the three parts of a proof, discussed in the Ringstone of Salih, where the significance of ternariness is addressed more generally.

[1206] Nisa'i 36:1

[1207] Ibn al-'Arabi here understands the tradition to mean that it is insofar as one knows one's own soul that one is able to know the Lord. From one point of view total knowledge of one's soul can be considered impossible, if we consider the soul in all of its particulars and infinite interlacing of qualities. However, there is an important way in which one can achieve knowledge of one's soul, and it is this level that is attained by the prophets and the saints. One can have a *total* knowledge without that knowledge being *infinite*, meaning that one's knowledge can meaningfully encompass the soul as a whole without requiring an awareness of all the particularities that may be present in it. As a

understand.

Women were made worthy of love to him, so he felt yearning for them, for it is the yearning a whole feels for its part.[1208] Through this he explained the reality as it concerns the Divine, spoken of in what He said concerning the elemental makeup of man, *I breathed into Him of My Spirit*. Elsewhere he describes Himself as having an intense longing to meet him, saying to those who long, "O David, I long for them more intensely," that is, those who long for Him. This is a particular meeting, for in a tradition about the Antichrist he said that, "None of you shall see his Lord until he dies."[1209] There must needs be a longing for one who is described in this way. The Real has a longing for these who are *brought near*, although He sees them. He wants them to see Him, but their station prevents this. This is akin to His Words, *Until We kno*w,[1210] even though He does know. He longs for this special quality, which has no existence except upon death.[1211] Through it he tests their longing for Him. Recall that He spoke in the tradition about hesitation, which pertains to this subject, "I

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consequence, if our knowledge of our Lord is a function of our knowledge of ourselves, then knowledge of God is possible from one perspective and is not possible from another.

[1208] I do not believe that Ibn al-'Arabi is making an absolute statement about what women are in relation to men, for each human being (*insan*) is a whole and total image of God. Rather, he is commenting here on the relationship between the masculine and the feminine. Man reflects more strongly the active principle, the spirit, while woman reflects more strongly the receptive principle, the soul. Ibn al-'Arabi's statement can understood to mean that the way in which man is attracted to woman is like the attraction that exists between the spirit and the soul. In terms of the complementarity between men and women at the 'human' level, man is more like the spirit and woman is more like the soul, although both are equally *insan*. Within the human world man's love for woman takes on this character, and similarly woman's love for man will have the character of the soul's attraction for the spirit. Although Ibn al-'Arabi describes the relationship between man and woman in metaphysical terms which are, so to speak, "above and below", the actual reality of how love manifests between man and woman is a complementarity of "left and right". That is to say, there is a way of envisaging the active and receptive principles in a vertical way, such as the manifestation of the Universal Spirit in the Universal Soul, which is a relationship of ontological dependence and superiority. However, in the masculine and feminine the active and passive become like the ying-yang symbol instead of a descending vertical chain, where superiority becomes a question of the point of view adopted. In the horizontal relationship of masculine and feminine, the power and authority of man is outward, obvious, and explicit, while the power and authority of woman is inward, hidden and implicit. It is thus that the vertical unfolding of the "whole" (the spirit) into its "parts" or particulars (the soul) is present in the love between a man and a woman.

[1209] Muslim 52:95

[1210] 47:31

[1211] That is, the reality of Sight encompasses the eternal and the becoming just as knowledge encompasses these two aspects. This particular verse was mentioned in the Ringstone of Luqman, p.***. God sees man eternally and unchangingly, but in the relationship between slave and Lord there is a coming to be of relationships that is not eternal but unfolds over time. The ultimate meeting of Lord and slave can only take place through the gate of death, whether that death is the volitional death of the realized few or the bodily death of all people whatever. The Lord cannot meet the slave until after death because a meeting implies a common experience between two sides. Indeed God sees man in his journey through the world, *quod absit*, but He can only truly meet his slave when His slave can see Him and meet Him ("He wants them to see Him"). This is the limitation that is intrinsic to the Lord-slave relationship while man lives before his death (again, either spiritual or bodily). It is this meeting which the Lord longs for.

hesitate not in anything I do as I hesitate in taking my believing slave, who hates dying, and I hate to harm him, but he must meet Me."[1212] He gave him glad tidings. He did not say, "He must die," lest he be overcome by the mention of death, for one does not meet the Real until after death. Recall that the Prophet said, upon him be peace, "None of you shall see his Lord until he dies." He said, transcendent is He, "But he must meet Me." The Real's longing is for the existence of this relationship.[1213]

The lover longs for the sight of Me
But stronger is My longing for him
The souls are impassioned, but the Decree hinders
I moan My complaint, and he moans his

Now, as He made clear that He breathed into him of His Spirit, let it be said that He longs for none other than Himself. Do you not see that His creation is His image since it comes from His Spirit? Since he is made up of these four pillars, which in his body are called humors, His breathing brought about the ignition of the humidity in his body. The spirit of man is igneous by reason of his makeup. That is why God did not speak to Moses except in the form of a fire, placing his need therein. Were his makeup to be natural,[1214] his spirit would be light. It was described as a breathing, alluding to its coming from the Breath of the All-Merciful. It is by this Breath, this breathing, that his identity is manifest, and by virtue of the preparedness of the recipient of this breathing the ignition was that of fire, not light.[1215] The Breath of the All-Merciful is inward as regards that which makes man man.

For him and from him He cleaved[1216] an individual in his image and named

[1212] This is a continuation of the aforementioned Divine Saying, "I will be his hand…"
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[1214] This is use of the word "natural" is found in the Ringstone of Jesus (p.***) where it describes the status of the angels. In this context "natural" is opposed to "elemental". Fire is one of the elements, and by virtue of the fact that man encompasses an elemental makeup, i.e. the physical body, the spirit of man is envisaged as fire instead of light. It seems likely that what Ibn al-'Arabi means here is the vital spirit or animal soul (*al-ruh al-hayawaniyyah*), and not the human spirit or rational soul. The fiery nature could correctly be attributed to the animal aspect of man's soul, but the human spirit at its highest level is no less luminous than the angels.
[1215] The recipient in this case is the elemental human body, and the spirit or energy that gives it life must be of like nature in order for the connection to be actualized. To the elemental makeup of the body, i.e. earth, wind, water, the correspondence is to fire, not light.
[1216] The verb *ishtaqqa* usually means the derivation of something, but it can also mean the taking of a half of something, which would be well in keeping with the Quranic verse, *who created thee from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from them did propagate men and women in great numbers* (4:1). The word for soul, *nafs*, is actually grammatically feminine. It would be logically absurd to suppose that the original soul was a male and then the female was made from him as such, because to speak of the male is already to have the presence of the female. When this mate was created, it was a mutual relationship, since the male and female could not but come into existence together.

her woman. She manifested in his image, and he yearned for her with the yearning a thing has for itself, and she yearned for him with the yearning a thing has for its homeland. Thus women were made worthy for him to love. Indeed God loves the one He created in His Image, and to whom the luminous angels did prostrate, even with the grandeur of their measure, their rank, and the exaltedness of their natural makeup. From this comes the correspondence,[1217] though the Image is greater, more resplendent and more perfect in terms of correspondence, for it is a mate, which is to say it makes even-numbered the existence of the Real, just as woman, with her existence, makes man even-numbered, thus making of him a mate. Thus the ternary is manifest: Real, man, and woman. Man yearns for his Lord who is his principle as woman yearns for him.[1218] Thus women were made worthy of love to him, as God loves the one who is His image. The love is felt for none other than one who is existentiated from Him, and his love was for the one from whom he was existentiated, and who is the Real. That is why he said, "made worthy of love to me," and did not say, from himself, "I love," for his love was attached to his Lord, whose image he is, even in his love for his wives. He loved them with the love of God for him, with divine virtue.

When a man loves a woman he seeks union, for the utmost union possible in love. There is no union in the form of the elemental makeup greater than the conjugal act. That is why desire encompasses every part of him, and that is why he is ordered to wash himself from it. Thus, purification encompasses him just as his perishing in her encompasses him when he fulfills his desires. God is jealous that His slave should believe that he can experience pleasure with another, so He purifies him with the greater Ablution so that he may return to contemplate Him in that wherein he perished, since there is naught but this.[1219]

[1217] That is, the aforementioned correspondence in longing between the Lord and the slave. The correspondence of man's being an image of God is even greater because it makes of God a "mate" in the way that woman makes man one of a pair.

[1218] Again, I believe that this can be understood in terms the masculine-feminine relationship described earlier. There is a commonality between the way man yearns for God and the way woman yearns for man because man is more like spirit while woman is more like soul. The relationship of all human beings to God, in this one sense of longing, is more like the relationship of women to men than of men to women. One could easily reverse the entire question by looking at men and women in terms of the giving of life. In this sense, the relationship of man to woman is more like the relationship of all human beings to God. From this starting point man can be seen as that which is derived or cleaved from woman, since the original soul was neither masculine nor feminine, or was both masculine and feminine.

[1219] The experience of sexual union causes desire and passion to be present everywhere in the body. So powerful is the joining between man and woman in this way that Ibn al-'Arabi speaks of man 'perishing' (*fana'*) in woman, which usually refers to the soul's realization of its own nothingness in God. The regular Ablution (*wudu'*) involves washing the hands, feet, face, and head, but the greater Ablution (*ghusl*) requires the washing of the entire body. After sexual intercourse a Muslim must perform the *ghusl* in order to enter into a state of ritual purity for offering Prayer. The totality of the purification thus corresponds to the totality of the desires in the body. It would seem that Ibn al-'Arabi sees the greater Ablution as maintaining the proper equilibrium between a man and woman, which

When man witnesses the Real in woman, it is a witnessing in a passive thing.[1220] When he witnesses Him in himself with respect to woman's manifesting from him he witnesses Him in an active thing. When he witnesses Him in himself without the presence of any form that has been existentiated out of him, his witnessing is only of something that is passive, without intermediary, in relation to the Real. Thus his witnessing Him in woman is more complete and more perfect, since he witnesses the Real with respect to being both active and passive; in himself it is only with respect to his being passive. That is why the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, loved women, owing to the perfection of his witnessing the Real in them, since the Real is never witnessed separate from a matter, for the Essence of God is beyond need of the worlds. Now, since it is impossible in that respect, and since witnessing can only take place in a matter, witnessing the Real in women is the greatest and most perfect witnessing.[1221]

The greatest union is the conjugal act, which is like unto the Divine turning His Face to the one He created in His Image, to make of him a vicegerent and to see himself in Him.[1222] So he formed him and set him up, and breathed into him of His Spirit, which is His Breath. He is outwardly creation and inwardly Real. That is why He described it as governing this frame, for by it He, transcendent is He, *governs the affair from heaven*, which is exaltedness, *to the earth*,[1223] which is *the lowest of the low*,[1224] for it is the lowest of pillars.[1225]

He named them using the word "women", which is a plural that has no singular. That is why he said, upon him be peace, "Three things have been made worthy of love to me: women…" and did not say "woman", taking into account their delay in coming into existence out of him. *Nus'ah* means "postponement". God most high said, *The month postponed is an increase in unbelief*.[1226] Also, to buy on credit

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would go towards a disequilibrium of mutual worship without a constant retrenchment in the waters of the Ablution. The man (or the woman, obviously the roles are mutual) performs the greater Ablution so that he may return to woman contemplate and see God in her after having been extinguished in her through his bodily desires. Later on Ibn al-'Arabi discusses the error of seeking after only physical pleasure.

[1220] "Passive" (*munfa'il*) in the sense of "acted upon" as opposed to "active" (*fa'il*).

[1221] Matter (*maddah*) here refers to any being, not only physical, in which one can find God. We can never perceive God as such, but we can perceive God in things, and for man woman is the most exalted 'matter' to manifest the Form of God. Qaysari mentions that the active element of man's contemplation of woman can be the fact that the reality of woman is identical with the reality of man, and thus she contains in herself both the active and passive wherein to contemplate God.

[1222] Qaysari comments that God's act of betaking Himself to existentiating human beings is like the act of man and woman turning towards one another to create a child. God creates in His Image, and after a fashion the child is created in the image of the father and mother.

[1223] 32:5

[1224] 95:5

[1225] The spirit of man governs his outward form, but his spirit is none other than an inbreathing of God's Spirit. It is the spirit of God which governs everything *from heaven to the earth*.

[1226] 9:37

is a postponement. That is why he said "women".[1227]

He loved them by virtue of their degree and by virtue of their being a locus of passivity. They were to him as nature is to the Real, in which he opened the forms of the world through turning His Face to them with His Will and Divine Command, which is marriage within the world of elemental forms, willpower in the luminous spiritual world, and the ordering of premises to reach a conclusion in the domain of ideas$_m$. All this is the marriage, in each of these modes, of the first odd-numberedness.[1228]

He who loves women in accordance with this definition possesses divine love. He who loves them only with respect to natural desires is deprived of knowledge of these desires. They are then like a form possessing no spirit. Even though in reality it is possessed of a spirit, it nevertheless remains unwitnessed for one who goes to his wife or any woman purely for enjoyment, not perceiving the one for whom he does this. He is thus ignorant of himself, just as another would be ignorant of him so long as he did not speak to name himself in order to be known. Someone has said:

In the sight of people I am truly a lover
Though they knoweth not who my love is for

Likewise, such a one loves the enjoyment, thus loving the locus where it is found, namely, woman, but with the spirit of the matter being hidden from him. If he knew, he would know the one with whom he experienced enjoyment as well as whom it was who experienced the enjoyment, and would be perfect. Just as woman stands a degree below man, in accordance with His Words, *But their men have a degree above them*,[1229] so too does the one created in His Image stand a degree below Him who set him up in His Image, even though he *is* His image. This degree, by which the He is distinguished from him, is that by which He is Beyond Need of the worlds and is the

[1227] The word used for "women" is *nisa'*, which is a collective noun that has no singular counterpart in Arabic, as opposed to *mar'ah* ("woman"), which has both a singular and a plural. It is this latter which, as Ibn al-'Arabi points out, the Prophet did not use, choosing instead to employ the collective *nisa'*. The root n-s-' can carry a sense of delay or postponement (*nus'ah*), postponed (*nasi'*), and purchase on credit (*nasi'ah*).

[1228] The primordial Wedding is between God's Command and the Breath of the All-Merciful. From this Union all things come to be. All other unions which give rise to offspring are an expression and manifestation of this eternal coming together. As has been discussed elsewhere, Nature is a way of speaking of the All-Merciful's Breath, the receptive principle of reality which receives and sustains the active principle which in this case is the Word or Command of God. God speaks things into being upon His very Breath. This primordial reality appears as the human conjugal act (which is what Ibn al-'Arabi means here), as well as the existentiation of things by the saint (which results from his *himmah* or spiritual willpower being brought to bear on some object), and even the structure of logic (where two premises bring about the conclusion). The first "odd-numberedness" (*fardiyyah*) refers to the original union of two to bring about the three, i.e. the joining of the Command to the Breath to brings about forms.

[1229] 2:228

Prime Agent. The image is a secondary agent. He does not have the primacy possessed by the Real. Identities are distinguished hierarchically.

Every knower gives all things their rightful due. That is why Muhammad's love for women, may God bless him and grant him peace, derived from the Divine Love, and because God *granteth each thing its creation*, which is that rightful due itself. He gave it for no other reason than deservedness; it deserved it by virtue of that which it named, that is to say, by virtue of the essence of the deserving thing. He placed women first because they are the locus of passivity, just as nature comes before the one who comes to exist out of it through form.[1230] In reality nature is none other than the Breath of the All-Merciful. Therein he unfolds the forms of the world, the exalted and the lowly, owing to the diffusion of the breathing within the hylic substance, in this case specifically in the world of bodies. As for its diffusion for the existence of the luminous spirits and accidents, that is another diffusion.[1231] Now, the Prophet, upon him be peace, had the feminine dominate over the masculine because he wanted to bring out its importance, saying, "Three [in the form indicating the feminine]", not saying, "Three [in the form indicating the masculine]," using the suffix for enumerating what is masculine in gender. There is mention of "perfume" therein, which is masculine, and it is the custom of the Arabs that the masculine predominate over the feminine. One says, "The Fatimahs and Zayd left [using the verb of the masculine plural]," and not, "left [using the verb of the feminine plural]." Thus the masculine predominates—even if it is only in a single term—over the feminine, even if they are several. He was an Arab, may God bless him and grant him peace, and was taking into consideration the meaning intended for him in this love, seeing that he did not chose his love. God taught him what he did not know, and God's beneficence upon him was great. Now, he had the feminine dominate over the masculine by saying "three" without the *ha'* [thus indicating a series of feminine words]. How knowledgeable was he of realities, may God bless him and grant him peace, and how intense his care in giving things their due![1232]

Then he made the seal, in its femininity, correspond to what came first, and inserted what was masculine between them. He began with "women" and ended with "Prayer", which are both feminine, and the "perfume" was between them as it is in existence, for indeed man falls between the Essence, from which he manifests, and

[1230] That is to say, nature is the receptacle that receives the forms of the world. Hence it must precede the existence of those forms, at least logically. Women are like nature in that they bear their children and precede them in existence.

[1231] The hylic substance here refers to the world of bodies and the realm of physical form. Forms also unfold at the level of spirits, but the Breath is different at that level than it is at the level of bodies.

[1232] Usually the presence of even a single grammatically masculine term will cause a group of objects to be referred to as a group of masculine things. Here, while there were two grammatically feminine terms, Prayer (*salah*) and women (*nisa'*), and one masculine term, perfume (*tib*), the Prophet treated it grammatically as though they were all grammatically feminine and indicated "three" by saying *thalath* and not *thalathah*.

woman, who manifests from him. He is thus between two femininities: the femininity of the Essence and true femininity.[1233] Likewise, "women" is truly feminine, whereas "Prayer" is not truly feminine,[1234] and "perfume" is between them just as Adam is between the Essence out of which he comes to exist and Eve who comes to exist from him. If you so wish you can say that "quality" is feminine as well, and if you so wish you can say that "power" is also feminine. Follow any path you wish, you shall always find that the feminine comes first, even among the people of causation who consider the Real to be the Cause of the existence of the world. "Cause" is feminine.[1235]

As for the wisdom of "perfume" and its being placed after women, it stems from the fact that the scents of bringing into being come from women. Indeed the sweetest of perfumes is in the embrace of the beloved, according to the well-known saying. Since he[1236] was created as a slave in his principle, he never set his sight on being a master. Rather, he never ceased prostrating and standing ready, being passive until God brought into being what He brought into being from him. He granted him the station of being active in the world of breaths, which are sweet perfumes.[1237] Thus perfumes were made worthy of love to him. For this reason he placed them after women. He took into consideration the degrees belonging to the Real in His Words, *The one who raises degrees, Possessor of the Throne*,[1238] having mounted it by His Name the All-Merciful. None of those who are enveloped by the Throne could remain untouched by the Divine Mercy, spoken of in His Words, *My Mercy encompasseth everything*.[1239] The Throne encompasses everything, and the one who mounts it is the All-Merciful. His Reality is the diffusion of Mercy in the world, as we have made clear in other places in this book as well as in *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*.

God, transcendent is He, used the good of that matrimonial union to vindicate ʻAishah: *Evil women are for evil men, and evil men are for evil women, and good*

[1233] *al-Dhat*, the Essence or Self, is feminine.
[1234] That is, it is only grammatically feminine.
[1235] Quality (*sifah*), power (*qudrah*), and cause (*ʻillah*) are all grammatically feminine in Arabic. It should be noticed that now Ibn al-ʻArabi has chosen a point of departure that places the feminine in the superior position vis-à-vis the masculine. If the Lord is symbolized more strongly in man, then the Essence is expressed more directly in woman. This reflects the fact that man's power and authority are outward while woman's is inward and hidden, much like the fact that the Lord's power is apparent while the Essence is ever concealed within forms.
[1236] That is, the Prophet.
[1237] The Prophet was always perfectly receptive to the Divine Will and never sought to manifest anything from himself. With the onset of his prophetic mission, he was called upon to perform certain great actions and even miracles, but this was always in active conformity with the Will of God. The Prophet's power operated in the "world of breaths", i.e. the spiritual world that governs the physical world. Here Ibn al-ʻArabi is saying that perfume and sweet scents can be seen as a reflection and expression of the world of spirits.
[1238] 40:15
[1239] 7:156

women are for good men, and good men are for good women, and they are innocent of what they say.[1240] He made their fragrances good, for spoken words are breath, which is identical with scent, and which comes out smelling good or smelling bad in accord with what manifests in the form of speech. By virtue of its being divine at root it[1241] is entirely good. It is good, but with respect to that which is praised or considered blameworthy it can be good or bad. Speaking of the bad smell of garlic, he said, "It is a plant whose smell I dislike,"[1242] but he did not say, "I dislike it." The thing itself is not what was disliked, only that which manifested from it was disliked. Such dislike can be of the usual kind, caused by something that runs contrary to one's nature or desire, or it can come from the Law, or it can result from some lack of perfection in what one seeks after, or something else besides what we have mentioned. Now, since we have established that the affair is divided into the good and the bad, perfume was made worthy of love for him, as opposed to bad smells. The angels are described as being irritated by bad smells, by the decay of this elemental makeup, for indeed it is created, *of a clay of mud moulded*,[1243] that is, of varying scent. The angels dislike it in its essence, just as the scarab suffers from the scent of a rose, which is a good fragrance. It does not smell good for the scarab. Whosoever possesses such a temperament, both in meaning and in form, shall suffer from the truth when he hears it and shall find joy in falsehood, spoken of in His Words, *As for those who believe in falsehood and disbelieve in God*.[1244] He described them as being lost, *They are lost, who lost their own souls*.[1245] Whoever cannot perceive the difference between good and evil possesses no perception. Only the good in everything was made worthy of love to the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, and there is nothing but that.[1246]

Is it conceivable that there should be a temperament in the world that only finds the good of everything—not knowing the bad—or not? We say it is not, for we do not find it in the principle from which the world manifests, and which is the Real. We find that He dislikes and that He loves.[1247] The bad is none other than what is

[1240] 24:26. The vindication spoken of involves an incident where some people accused 'Aishah, one of the wives of the prophet, of promiscuity. This verse was part of the Quranic assertion of her innocence of the charges, meaning that since she was a wife of the Prophet, and the Prophet was good and pure, so too was she good and pure as his wife.

[1241] That is, insofar as the breath is none other than a self-disclosure of God.

[1242] Muslim 5:76

[1243] 15:26 *Masnun* ("moulded"), a word which also has a meaning of "foul-smelling".

[1244] 29:52

[1245] 6:12

[1246] From a certain point of view everything is a good, even the bad things said by bad people, which are only bad from a point of view other than the one from which all things are good. From God's perspective everything is a good, since all is He, but from the point of view of the world and of multiplicity evil enters in by definition. Because the world is not God, there must of necessity be good and bad.

[1247] This does not contradict the earlier statement that from God's point of view everything is good. It is from the point of view where everything is God that all things are good, but from the point of view

disliked and the good is none other than what is loved. The world is the image of the Real, and man is of two images.[1248] There is no temperament that only perceives a single thing in everything. Rather, what one has is a temperament that knows the good from the bad, knowing that what is bad through experience is good without experience, so he occupies himself with perceiving the good of it in place of sensing what is bad of it. This can be.[1249] As for removing what is bad from the world—that is, from being—it cannot be. God's Mercy is in the good and the bad. In its own sight the bad is good, while in its sight the good is bad. There is nothing that is good that is not bad for some temperament, and the reverse is also true.

As for the third thing by which the odd-numberedness[1250] is completed, it is the Prayer. He said, "And my comfort was placed in the Prayer," because it is a witnessing, and that is because it is an intimate discourse between God and his slave. Recall that He said, *Remember Me, and I shall remember you*.[1251] This is worship divided into two halves between God and his slave. Half belongs to God and half to the slave. Recall that it is related in the authentic saying traced back to God most high that He said, "I have divided the Prayer into halves, between Myself and My slave; half is Mine and half is for My slave, and My slave shall have what he asketh for. The slave saith, *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate*.[1252] God saith, 'My slave hath remembered Me.' The slave saith, *Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds*. God saith, 'My slave hath praised Me.' The slave saith, *The All-Merciful, the Compassionate*. God saith, 'My slave hath extolled Me.' The slave saith, *Master of the Day of Judgment*. God saith, 'My slave hath magnified me, and My slave has submitted all to Me.'" The entire first half belongs to Him alone. "Then the slave saith, *It is Thee whom we worship, and with Thee we seek help*. God saith, 'This is between Me and My slave, and My slave shall have what he asketh for.'" He made a thing in common. "The slave saith, *Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray*. God saith, 'All of them are for My slave, and My slave shall have what he asketh for.'" These are for His slave alone, just as what came first is for Him alone, transcendent is He. From this one knows the necessity of

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of the Lord of the world there are evils which God dislikes. This brings us back to the command of bringing into being and the command by intermediation. By the former God brings all things into being without distinction, but by the latter he makes known what he loves and what he dislikes.

[1248] That is, man is both in the image of God and in the image of the world. I believe that what this means is that although man has the capacity to see all things as good by virtue of being made in God's image, he is also a part of the world and hence is subject to the opposition of qualities and the existence of good and bad.

[1249] That is to say, as a practical matter a person can wholly occupy himself with the good and turn his attention away from evil things, for to not experience evil is itself a good. Such a person tries to find the good in things, and of such a person one can say that he knows only the good, though this is not an absolute statement.

[1250] That is, the group of three things mentioned in the Prophet's saying.

[1251] 2:152

reciting, *Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Worlds*. Whoever does not recite it does not offer this Prayer divided between God and His slave.

Since it is an intimate discourse, it is a remembrance, and whose remembers the Real keeps company with the Real and Real keeps company with him. And it is true, contained in the divine saying, that God most high said, "I keep company with him who remembereth Me."[1253] Whoever keeps company with the one he remembers will, if he is possessed of sight, see the one with whom he keeps company. This is witnessing and vision. If he is not possessed of sight he will not see Him. From this the person offering Prayer will know his rank: does he see the Real in the Prayer or not? If he does not see Him then let him worship Him with faith, as though he saw Him, imagining Him in his *qiblah* during the intimate discourse, and let him lend his ear to whatever reply that may come to him from the Real. If he is an *imam* for his own specific world and for the angels who offer Prayer with him—and every person offering Prayer is an *imam* without doubt, for the angels offer Prayer behind the slave when he offers Prayer alone, as has been related in the authentic saying—he attains the station of the messengers in the Prayer, and this is to be God's deputy. When he says, "God heareth the one who praiseth Him," he is telling himself and those behind him that God has heard them. The angels and those present say, "Our Lord! Praise be Thine!" Indeed God says, on the tongue of the slave, "God heareth the one who praiseth Him."[1254] Contemplate the exaltedness of the Prayer's rank, and the end to which it brings him who offers it. Whoso has not attained the degree of vision in the Prayer has not reached its utmost end, and does not have his comfort therein, for he does not see the one with whom he is having intimate discourse. And if he does not hear the answer given to him by the Real in it, then he is not one who lends ear. Whoso is not present with his Lord therein, not hearing and not seeing, is not praying at all, for he is not among those who *lendeth ear as a witness*.[1255]

There is no act of worship that prevents other activity, so long as it lasts, other than the Prayer.[1256] The remembrance of God is the greatest thing in it from among the sayings and actions it comprises. We have spoken of the qualities of the person who is perfect in Prayer in *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah.*[1257] Indeed God most high says, *Indeed the Prayer forbids indecency and dishonor*,[1258] because it has been prescribed

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[1252] 1:1-7 This Divine Saying is found in Muslim 4:38.
[1253] Muslim 48:2
[1254] After the initial bowing one rises and says, *sami 'aLlahu liman hamidahu* ("God heareth the one who praiseth Him"), often followed by the words*, Rabbana wa laka'l-hamd* ("Our Lord! Praise be Thine!") said by the person himself or by the congregation following the imam.
[1255] 50:37
[1256] That is to say, the Prayer requires the attention of the entire body as well as the mind. One cannot depart significantly from the motions of the Prayer without rendering it invalid.
[1257] In the *Futuhat* Ibn al-'Arabi has long discussions of the significance and practice of the Prayer as well as the other Five Pillars (i.e. fasting, alms, pilgrimage).
[1258] 29:45, which is continued below with, *And the remembrance of God is greater; and God knows the things you work*.

for the person in Prayer that he not engage in any activity other than this act of worship so long as he is in it and can be said to be praying. *And the remembrance of God is greater,* that is, within it; that is, the remembrance that is from God to his slave when He responds his request and praise for Him is greater than the slave's remembrance of his Lord, for greatness is God's, transcendent is He. That is why He said, *And God knows the things you work*, and said, *or who lendeth ear as a witness*.[1259] His lending ear results from God's remembrance of him in it.[1260]

Another aspect of this is that the Prayer—as the world is conveyed from non-existence into existence by virtue of an intelligible motion—comprises all motions, which are three: an upright motion, which is when the praying person stands; a horizontal motion, which is when the praying person bows; and a downward motion, which is when he prostrates. The motion of man is upright, the motion of animals is horizontal, and the motion of plants is downward. In themselves inanimate objects have no motion; when a stone moves it is because of something else.[1261]

As for his saying, "My comfort was placed in the Prayer," which was a placement he did not attribute to himself, let it be said that the self-disclosure of the Real to the person in Prayer comes from Him, transcendent is He, and not from the person offering Prayer. Had he not mentioned this quality of His it would have been that he was commanded to a Prayer without a self-disclosure from Him to him.[1262] Since this came from Him by way of free-giving, the witnessing takes place by way of free-giving.[1263] He said, "My comfort was placed in the Prayer," and this is none other than witnessing the beloved, who causes the lover's eyes to be comforted, from

[1259] 50:37

[1260] The phrase *wa ladhikruLlahi akbar*^{u} can be translated either as, "The remembrance of God is greater," or, "The remembrance of God is greatest," which are both allowable with the use of the indefinite superlative *akbar*. (If it read *al-akbar* it could only mean "greatest".) The remembrance (*dhikr*) can also be understood in two ways, either as our remembrance of God or God's own remembrance of something. God can be the object or the owner of the remembering in this Arabic sentence. The remembrance of God begins mysteriously with God, for His remembrance of us is our very being. If God were to forget us for moment we would cease to exist. Even beyond the act of existence, all prayer is a grace whose origin is not human but divine. We remember God as a result, again mysteriously, of God remembering us. As Ibn al-Arabi mentions near the end of the Ringstone of Jesus (p.***) when we ask something of God it is because He has graced us to do so.

[1261] The Prayer is a quintessentially human act, and like the human reality expresses a totality in its very form. Man is in the image of the world, and the motions of man's prayer are in the image of the motions of the world: vertical, horizontal, and downward. It can be noted that these correspond to the three gunas of Hindu thought: *satwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, which are the ascendant tendency, the expansive tendency, and the downward tendency respectively.

[1262] The quality is the fact of Prayer containing a comfort for the worshipper, which here is none other than a self-disclosure.

[1263] The self-disclosure is the witnessing that gives comfort in the Prayer. The Prophet says, "was placed in the Prayer," because it is God who placed it there as a free gift. The witnessing comes from God by way of free-giving (*imtinan*) because the self-disclosure comes by way of free-giving.

"to be fixed".[1264] The eye becomes fixed once it has vision of Him, be it in something or not, and looks upon no other thing together with Him. That is why it is forbidden to turn elsewhere during the Prayer. Turning elsewhere is something that Satan pilfers from the Prayer, denying him the witnessing of his beloved. Indeed, were He the beloved of this one who turns elsewhere, he would not have turned his face away from the *qiblah* in his Prayer. Man knows his state in his soul, knowing whether he like is that in this special act of worship or not, for indeed, *Man discerns his soul, though he may offer excuses*.[1265] In his soul he knows his falsehood from his truthfulness, for indeed a thing is not ignorant of its state, for it possesses its state through taste.

Moreover, what we call Prayer has another part. He, transcendent is He, has ordered us to offer Prayer to Him, and has informed us that He offers Prayer upon us.[1266] Thus the Prayer is from us and from Him. When He is offering Prayer, He does so by virtue of His Name the Last, for it comes after the existence of the slave, and is the very Real the slave creates in his heart through mental contemplation or through imitation. This is the divinity of beliefs. It is variegated in accordance with the preparedness of the locus, as in Junayd's saying, when asked about the knower and knowledge of God, "The water's color is that of its container." The reply accomplishes its task and tells us of the affair *as it is*. This is God who offers Prayer upon us. When we offer Prayer, the Name the Last is ours, and therein we are like the possessor of this Name of whom we spoke. Thus, what we are for Him is a function of our state, and He looks to us through none other than the form we bring to Him. The person offering Prayer comes after the frontrunner in the race.[1267]

As for His Words, *each knows its Prayer and glorification*,[1268] they refer to its

[1264] To be comforted (*taqarru biha al-'ayn*) literally means "a coolness for the eyes", which Ibn al-'Arabi is associating with the word to become fixed (*istiqrar*) which, along with the verb *taqarru*, comes from the root q-r-r.

[1265] 79:14:15

[1266] There is a slight verbal difference here. We offer prayer "to" God (*lahu*) whereas God offers prayer "upon" us (*'alayna*). This has Quranic support, for example in the verse, *Verily God and his angels offer prayer upon the Prophet, O you who believe, offer prayer upon him…* (33:56)

[1267] Signifying that the person in Prayer comes after the self-disclosure. The word for the person in Prayer (*musalli*) is the same word that refers to a horse that is behind the leader in a race. Here Ibn al-'Arabi is interpreting the prayer that God offers upon us to be none other than His self-disclosure in the form of our 'divinity of beliefs'. The "frontrunner" is the invisible self-disclosure which grants the preparedness of the heart. The Real of beliefs comes *after* the praying person in the sense that the 'created' divinity is a form in the soul of the worshipper and so is logically dependent upon that soul; in relation to us this divinity is not 'First' but 'Last'. The very form that this divinity of beliefs takes, however, is itself determined by the nature of the original self-disclosure that grants the heart's preparedness; in this sense God is 'First' and we are 'last'. God is the colorless water that takes on color as a function of the color of the vessel, but it must also be remembered that the color of the vessel is a self-disclosure of God before the self-disclosure of the water.

[1268] 24:41

rank of delay[1269] in its worship of its Lord, and to its glorification which its preparedness grants because of incomparability. *Nothing is, that does not glorify by its Lord's praises, the Clement, the Forgiving*.[1270] That is why the world's glorification is not understood in detail, each one by one. Moreover, there is a level where the pronoun reverts to the slave who glorifies within it, spoken of in His Words, *There is naught that does not glorify by* its[1271] *praises*, that is, by the praises of that thing. The pronoun in *its praises* reverts to the thing, that is, through the praise given to Him. Recall that we have said, concerning the object of one's beliefs, that one praises none other than the divinity of his beliefs and attaches his soul to it. He has no action that does not come from himself, and so he lauds only himself, for without doubt whosoever praises the product praises the artisan, for its excellence or lack thereof depends upon its artisan. The divinity of beliefs, crafted by he who contemplates it, is his own production. His praise for the object of his belief is his praise for himself, and this is why he counts as blameworthy the beliefs of another. If he were fair-minded he would not have done so. There is no doubt that he who has this specific object of worship is being ignorant in this, for he rejects the other through his belief in God. If he knew what Junayd had said, namely that, "The water's color is that of its container," he would have allowed every holder of a belief his belief, and would have known God in every form and in every belief. He supposes but does not know, and because of this He said, "I am as My slave's thought of Me is,"[1272] only manifesting to him in the form of his belief. If he wishes he makes absolute, and if he wishes he qualifies. The divinity of beliefs is subject to limits, and this is the divinity encompassed by the heart of its slave. Indeed the absolute Divinity is not encompassed, for it is identical with things and with Itself. Of a thing one neither says that it encompasses itself nor that it does not encompass itself, so understand.

And God speaketh the Truth, and guideth the way.

[1269] "Rank in delay" refers to the way in which one is a *musalli*, i.e. a praying being, not forgetting the symbolism of the horse-race mentioned above. Since each being prays, each 'comes after' the frontrunner in the race in a different way, i.e. at a different rank or place in the hierarchy of things.

[1270] 17:44

[1271] Instead of "His", since the pronoun allows of both readings.

[1272] Bukhari 97:35.

This is completed with God's praises, His succor, and the beauty of His grace. Praise belongs to God, the One. May God bless our liege-lord Muhammad, his Family, and Companions, and grant them peace in abundance. May God grace what comes of it through Muhammad and his Family. Amen.

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